THE THORN AND
THE CARNATION
YAHYA AL-SINWAR

The Thorn and the Carnation

Part I and Part II

Yahya Al-Sinwar

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

The Book and the Author

The Book: Clove Thorns
The Author: Yahya Ibrahim Al-Sinwar

A Palestinian from a family that migrated from the city of Ashkelon in 1948 to the Gaza Strip.

- Born in 1962 in Khan Yunis Refugee Camp.
- Earned a Bachelor's degree in Arabic Language and Literature from the Islamic University of Gaza, and was among the pioneers of the Islamic Resistance in Palestine.
- Imprisoned in early 1988, sentenced to life imprisonment, and has remained a prisoner in the occupation's jails since that date.
- Wrote this novel, 'Clove Thorns,' blending his memories and the story of his people, encompassing their pains and hopes. He made it the story of every Palestinian and all Palestinians, in a dramatic work with real events and mostly fictional characters, with some based on real people.
- The novel addresses most of the key milestones in Palestinian history since the setback of 1967 up to the early stages of the blessed Al-Aqsa Intifada.
- This novel was written in the darkness of captivity in the occupation's prisons in Palestine. Dozens strived to copy it and attempt to hide it from the eyes and tainted hands of the torturers, exerting tremendous effort in doing so, working like ants to bring it into the light, to be accessible to readers and perhaps to be depicted on screens, presenting a true picture of the reality in the Land of Isra.

Author's Preface

This is not my personal story, nor is it the story of any particular individual, although all its events are real. Each event, or each set of events, pertains to this or that Palestinian. The only fiction in this work is its transformation into a novel revolving around specific characters, to fulfill the form and requirements of a novelistic work. Everything else is real; I have lived it, and much of it I have heard from the mouths of those who themselves, their families, and their neighbours have experienced it over decades on the beloved land of Palestine.

I dedicate this to those whose hearts cling to the land of Isra and Mi'raj, from the ocean to the Gulf, indeed, from ocean to ocean.

Yahya Ibrahim Al-Sinwar
Beersheba Prison, 2004

Chapter One

The winter of 1967 was heavy, refusing to depart and competing with the spring trying to peek through with its bright, warm sun. The winter fought back with clouds gathering in the sky, and then the rain poured down heavily, flooding the simple homes in Al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza City. Streams ran through the camp's alleys, invading the homes and crowding the residents in their small rooms with floors lower than the nearby street level.

Time and again, the winter floodwaters surged into our small home's courtyard and then inside the house where our family had been living since settling down after migrating from the town of Faluja in the Occupied Territories in 1948. Each time, fear gripped me and my three brothers and sister, who were all older than me. My father and mother would rush to lift us off the ground, and my mother would hurriedly raise the bedding before the invading waters soaked it. Being the youngest, I would cling to my mother's neck alongside my infant sister, who was usually in her arms in such situations.

Often, I woke up at night to my mother's hands shifting me aside to place an aluminium pot or a large clay dish on her bed to catch the water droplets seeping through the crack in the tiled roof covering that small room. A pot here, a clay dish there, and a third container somewhere else. I would try to sleep again, sometimes succeeding, only to be awakened by the sound of water droplets hitting the accumulated water in that container rhythmically. When the container was full or nearly full, the water would splash around with each drop. My mother

would then get up to replace the full container with a new one and go outside to empty it.

I was five years old, and on a morning during winter, when the spring sun was trying to reclaim its natural place and erase the traces of the winter's dark nightly assault on the camp, my seven-year-old brother, Mohammed, took my hand, and we walked through the camp's streets to its outskirts where an Egyptian army camp was stationed.

The Egyptian soldiers at that camp were very fond of us. One of them got to know us and called us by our names. Whenever we appeared, he would shout, "Mohammed, Ahmad... come here..." So, we would go to him and stand beside him, lowering our heads in anticipation of what he usually gave us. He would reach into the pocket of his military pants and pull out a piece of pistachio candy for each of us. We would grab our pieces and start devouring them eagerly. The soldier would pat our shoulders, stroke our heads, and tell us to go back home. Then we would start dragging our feet back through the camp's alleyways.

Winter eventually left after a long stay and severity, and the weather began to warm up wonderfully. The rain no longer ambushed us with its calamities. I thought a long time had passed since the wait for winter, and that it wouldn't return soon. However, I sensed an atmosphere of anxiety and confusion around me. Everyone at home was in a much worse state than those rainy nights. I couldn't comprehend what was happening, but it wasn't normal, not even on winter nights. My mother was filling all her containers with water and placing them in the courtyard. My father borrowed a pickaxe (Torriya) from the neighbours and began digging a large, long hole in the yard in front of our house, with some help from my brother Mahmoud, who was twelve at the time.

After they finished preparing the hole, my father started placing pieces of wood on it and then began covering it with zinc sheets that used to cover part of the courtyard like an arbor. I realized my father was in a quandary as he started looking for something and then I saw him begin to dismantle the kitchen door to cover that hole. But then I saw my mother and Mahmoud descending into the hole through an opening that hadn't yet been sealed. That's when I understood the work was finished. I dared to approach that opening and peered into the hole, finding what looked like a dark room underground. I didn't understand anything, but it was clear we were expecting something difficult and unusual, seemingly much harsher than those stormy rainy nights.

No one held my hand again to take me to the nearby Egyptian army camp for a bit of pistachio candy. My brother repeatedly refused to do so, a significant change for me and Mohammed, which I couldn't understand. Hassan, too, didn't know our secret. Perhaps he did, but he wasn't part of it. I didn't know why he hadn't joined us yesterday. However, my cousin Ibrahim, who was about my age and lived in the house next door, was aware of the matter.

When Mohammed refused to go and take me with him, I went to my uncle's house to be with Ibrahim. I pushed the door open and entered the room where my uncle, whose facial features I could never recall, was sitting with a rifle in his hand, fixing it. I thought to myself that maybe I could do something similar with it. The rifle caught my attention, and I focused on it the entire time.

My uncle called me over and seated me beside him, placing the rifle on my hands. He started talking to me about it in a way I couldn't understand, then he patted my head and ushered me out of the room. I took Ibrahim with me, and we left the house, heading towards the outskirts of the camp to go to the nearby Egyptian army camp.

When we arrived, everything had changed. The soldier who used to wait for us and welcome us was not there. The situation was abnormal, as the Egyptian soldiers usually greeted us warmly. They yelled at us to go away and return to our mothers, so we turned back, dragging our disappointment behind us, having not received our share of the pistachio candy. I couldn't understand the changes that had occurred. The next day, my mother took some bedding from the house and laid it in the hole. She moved a couple of jugs of water and some food there, taking all of us down into the hole and sitting us there. Then my uncle's wife and her children, Hassan and Ibrahim, joined us. I was annoyed by the cramped space we were squeezed into without a reason I could comprehend. We had left our house, its rooms, courtyard, and the neighbourhood streets to be placed here against our will. Every time I tried to leave or rush towards the opening, my mother would pull me back and seat me in my place. Occasionally, she would give me a piece of bread and a few olives.

As the sun began to set and the daylight faded, darkness grew in the hole we were sheltered in, and fear crept into our young hearts. We started to cry and push to get out, but my mother and uncle stopped us. They yelled, "Children, it's war out there! Don't you know what war means?" At that moment, I didn't know the

meaning of war, but I understood it was something terrifyingly abnormal, dark, and suffocating.

Our attempts to leave and their efforts to stop us continued, and our cries grew louder, but their attempts to calm us were futile. Then Mahmoud said, "Should I bring the lamp, mother, to light it up?" ("Yama, should I get the light to turn it on?") She replied, "Yes, Mahmoud," but as he rushed to leave the trench, my mother's hand reached out to grab him, stopping him from leaving, saying, "Don't go out, Mahmoud" ("Don't go out, Yama").

My mother sat Mahmoud down and then went out to return with a kerosene lamp. She lit it, illuminating our space, bringing a sense of calm and tranquility. Overwhelmed by sleep, just like my siblings and cousins, I dozed off. My mother and my uncle's wife fought against sleep, but it overtook them. The next day was unremarkable; we spent almost the entire day in the trench. Our neighbour, teacher Aisha, constantly listened to the radio, making sure to stay close to the trench opening so the radio could receive transmission signals. She updated my mother and uncle's wife with the latest news, increasing the atmosphere of depression and sadness, reflecting on my mother and uncle's wife's ability to cater to our needs. Their hands seemed heavier on us as they asked for silence. The fiery statements from "Ahmed Said," the commentator on Voice of the Arabs from Cairo, about throwing the Jews into the sea and threats to the state of Israel, began to weaken and fade. In contrast, our dreams of returning to our homelands from which we were exiled began to crumble like the sandcastles we used to build as children in the neighbourhood. Our greatest wish was to return to the area we came from, for my uncle, who was enlisted in the Palestine Liberation Army, to return safely to his family, and for my father, who had left with the popular resistance, to return safely to us. With each new news bulletin that Mrs. Aisha listened to, the gloom and tension increased, leading to more prayers and hands raised to the sky, asking for safety and the return of my father and uncle. The sounds of explosions grew louder, closer, and more intense. My mother would occasionally leave the trench for a few minutes inside the house and then return with something for us to eat, cover ourselves with, or to reassure my uncle's wife about the fate of my grandfather, who insisted on staying in his room in the house, refusing to join us in the trench.

Initially, my grandfather hoped to return soon to our house and fields in Faluja, believing that the danger would be to the Jews who would be crushed by the Arab armies. But after the new equation of the battle became clear, not in our favor as

Arabs, he refused to descend into the trench, seeing no taste or value in life anymore. He wondered how long we would continue to hide and flee from our fate. "Death and life have become the same," he said.

Darkness fell again, and we sank into sleep, intermittently woken by increasingly loud explosions. The next morning, the explosions grew even louder. That day, nothing significant happened except for one incident: a large crowd of people surged in, shouting, "Spy! Spy!

It was evident that the people were chasing the alleged spy, who had something like a wheeled vehicle or similar, and they believed he was somehow connected to the Jews. The explosions increased in frequency and intensity, getting closer and clearly starting to hit the western houses. With each new explosion, our terror and screams increased, despite attempts to calm us down. Every now and then, Aisha would approach the trench opening to listen to the news and inform my mother and uncle's wife of the latest updates. After several days like this, my mother could no longer go out to the house like she did in the first two days. Aisha listened to a news bulletin, and as she heard the news, she started crying and wailing. She collapsed, muttering that the Jews had occupied the country. A moment of silence ensued, broken by my little sister Mariam's scream of pain at what was happening, followed by our collective crying, echoing our mothers' tears.

The sound of bombing and explosions stopped, and we heard only occasional gunfire. As evening approached, the noise ceased, and silence prevailed. In the evening, the neighbours' voices grew louder as they began to emerge from the trenches where they had been hiding or from their homes where they had stayed all this time. Aisha went out to investigate and came back shortly, saying, "The war is over... come out..." My mother and uncle's wife came out first, then called us to join them. For the first time in days, we breathed fresh air, though it was tinged with the smell of gunpowder and the dust of nearby demolished houses. I managed to look around before my mother pulled me into the house, seeing the devastation all around us, with many of the neighbours' homes affected by the shelling. Our house was fine, unharmed. Inside, my grandfather welcomed us, embracing and kissing each of us, muttering thanks to God for our safety and praying for the safe return of our fathers.

My uncle's wife and her children spent that night with us. My father and uncle did not return that night, and it seemed it would be a long time before they did. With the morning, life began to stir in the camp's alleys. Everyone was looking for their children, relatives, and neighbours to check on them and thank God for their

safety, and to find out the fate of those whose homes had been hit and destroyed or partially damaged.

There were limited cases of death in the neighbourhood since most people had fled to the beach, nearby orchards, or open spaces, or had taken refuge in the trenches they had dug. The occupation forces faced fierce resistance in one of the areas and withdrew, but soon after, a group of tanks and military jeeps waving Egyptian flags appeared. The resistance fighters, hopeful of support, emerged from their hiding places, firing into the air in celebration and gathered to welcome them. As the convoy approached, it opened heavy fire on the resistance fighters, killing many, and then raised the Israeli flag instead of the Egyptian flags on the tanks and vehicles.

People swarmed the nearby schools, which had been Egyptian army camps before the war, scavenging what remained. Some carried chairs, others tables, a third a bag of grains, a fourth kitchen utensils, and so on, rather than leaving these for the occupation soldiers. Some people, caught up in the chaos, looted nearby shops, taking goods and merchandise. Others focused on weapons and ammunition left in the camps. This state of chaos lasted several days, with everyone engrossed in their own concerns and interests. Just before noon one day, distant voices over loudspeakers in broken Arabic announced a curfew, warning that anyone leaving their home risked death. People began to stay indoors as military jeeps with loudspeakers circulated, announcing this and then ordering all men over 18 to gather at the nearby school, warning that anyone who disobeyed risked death.

My father and uncle had not returned, and my older brother Mahmoud was younger than 18. When my grandfather went out to head to the school, a soldier shouted at him to return home after seeing his old age and frailty, so he left, confused and troubled. Soon after, large groups of occupation soldiers, armed with rifles, began storming the houses one by one, searching for men who had not gone to the school. When they found some, they shot them without hesitation.

The men of the neighbourhood gathered in the nearby school where the soldiers seated them on the ground in tightly packed rows, with the soldiers surrounding them, rifles aimed at them. After all the men were assembled, a military jeep with a covered back arrived. A man in civilian clothes, clearly part of the occupation forces as the soldiers obeyed him noticeably, stepped out. He started ordering the men to stand up one by one and walk past the recently arrived jeep. As the men complied, a soldier signaled them to move. Occasionally, a horn (the "zamour")

would sound as a man passed, and the soldiers would violently grab and drag him to a more heavily guarded area behind the school.

It became clear that those who caused the horn to sound were identified as dangerous and were thus seized. This process continued until the last man had passed. Those who passed without the horn sounding were seated on the other side of the courtyard.

When the task was complete, the man in civilian clothes, who introduced himself as "Abu Al-Deeb," an Israeli intelligence officer responsible for the area, addressed the seated men in heavily accented but understandable Arabic. He spoke at length about the new reality following the Arab defeat, expressing his desire for calm and order. He warned that anyone disrupting security would face execution or imprisonment, and he invited anyone needing services from the Israeli Defense Army to approach his office. After he finished speaking, he instructed the men to leave one by one, calmly and without chaos. The men began to leave the school for their homes, each feeling as if they had escaped certain death. About a hundred men from the neighbourhood had been separated out by the soldiers.

The officer moved with the jeep he had arrived into the courtyard where the selected men were gathered. He ordered them to stand up one by one and pass in front of the jeep again. Each time the horn sounded, the passing man was seized again and made to stand near a nearby wall, facing it, while the others sat at the edge of the courtyard.

Fifteen men were chosen from this group and lined up against the wall. The officer ordered several soldiers to aim their rifles at these men. The soldiers, kneeling, fired at them, causing them to fall in agony. The remaining men, sweating profusely, had their hands tied behind their backs, and their eyes blindfolded. They were then loaded onto a bus that headed towards the Egyptian border. The soldiers accompanying them ordered them to cross the border into Egypt, warning that anyone who hesitated or looked back would be shot to death.

Chapter Two

Days passed, and there was no return or news of my father and uncle. My grandfather, mother, and uncle's wife left no stone unturned, asking everyone they could about them, to no avail. Our concern was shared by many neighbours, as many from the Palestine Liberation Army and the popular resistance were missing. The entire neighbourhood, like other areas in the West Bank and Gaza, was in a state of despair, frustration, and chaos, with people unsure of what to do.

Every morning, my grandfather would take his cane and go out searching for his sons, asking everyone he met about them, until exhaustion overtook him. My mother and uncle's wife, who hadn't left our house since the end of the war, would sit near the door, anxiously waiting for any new information, their fears and anxieties over their husbands' unknown fate consuming them. My siblings, cousins, and I understood the situation well, but I was too young to fully comprehend what was happening around me. My mother and uncle's wife, preoccupied with their worries, paid us less attention, leaving my elder sister Fatima to provide us with food and ensure some necessary cleanliness.

One evening, as the sun set, the time for my grandfather's return from his daily search drew near. My mother opened the door, looking down the street for his arrival. Soon, my grandfather appeared, leaning heavily on his cane, barely able to carry himself, dragging his feet in a way that suggested the news he bore weighed heavily on him. My mother cried out to my elder brother Mahmoud to run and help him. Mahmoud rushed over and saw our grandfather's face covered in tears. Despite Mahmoud's attempts to coax words from him, our grandfather remained silent until they reached the door. Leaning against the wall, his legs no longer able to support him, he began to collapse as he stepped inside. My mother and uncle's wife rushed to catch him, anxiously asking him about the news. He was unable to speak or even move. Everyone in the house gathered around him as they helped him to his bed, waiting for any word that might escape his lips.

My mother gave my grandfather a clay jug, which he struggled to hold and lift. She helped him drink a few sips of water. His gaze focused more on my uncle's wife, indicating that the news he had concerned my uncle rather than my father. The anxiety of my uncle's wife increased as she pleaded to know what had happened. When my grandfather's tears burst forth as he tried to compose

himself, my uncle's wife understood what he couldn't say and screamed, asking if Mahmoud had died. My grandfather nodded confirmation, causing her wailing and screaming to intensify as she began to pull her hair out. My mother also started crying, but tried to console her as she repeated, "Mahmoud is dead." The children, including my cousins and siblings, wept while I stood frozen, not fully understanding what was happening. The sound of knocking at the door broke the heavy silence. Mahmoud went to see who it was and found a group of neighbours who had heard the crying and came to share in the sorrow. The room filled with people, their cries and wails echoing around.

As days passed, there was no news about the fate of my father. The last anyone had seen him, he was alive when the Jews occupied the city, withdrawing southward with a group of popular resistance fighters. After mourning my uncle, my grandfather resumed his search for news about my father's fate. With time, he came to the realization that all he could do was wait, losing hope of receiving any new information. The news, if any, would come on its own. Life had to move on, and everyone had to adapt to the new reality. Schools reopened, and my siblings, cousin, and I returned to school. My mother and uncle's wife would get us ready in the mornings. I stayed home with my infant sister and cousin Ibrahim. During the day, my grandfather would leave the house and sometimes return with a few vegetables, like tomatoes, a bunch of spinach, some potatoes, or eggplants, which my mother or uncle's wife would cook for our return from school.

Every morning, my mother or uncle's wife would carry clay water jugs and an iron water heater to line them up in a queue of similar items in front of the water tap installed by the relief agency in the neighbourhood square. The water flowed for two or three hours a day, and those who reached their turn filled their containers; those who didn't had to wait until the next day or borrow some water from neighbours. Often, one of the neighbours who missed waking up early to place her container at the front of the line would try to steal a spot ahead of others, leading to arguments and physical altercations, sometimes even resulting in broken clay jugs. Near the tap, the ground was covered with a layer of broken clay. When my brothers and the neighbour's children returned from school, they would play a game called "Seven Pieces" using pieces of broken pottery from the tap area. They would prepare seven circular pieces of varying sizes, placing the largest at the bottom and the smallest at the top. Using a cloth ball made from old socks obtained from the relief agency's biannual clothing distribution, the children split into two teams. One player would try to knock over the pottery stack from a distance. If they succeeded, the team members would run while a player from the

opposing team, standing by the stack, tried to hit them with the ball. If they missed, they would wait for their team members to retrieve the ball, while the opponents attempted to restack the pottery. If they succeeded, they continued playing; if they failed, they fled to avoid being hit by the ball as it returned to the play area.

The girls, meanwhile, played a game called "Hojala," using a smooth piece of tile or stone and drawing three consecutive squares on the ground, each about a meter in length and width, with a circle at the top of the third square.

Sometimes, boys played "Arabs and Jews," dividing into two teams and pretending to shoot each other with wooden sticks. Disputes often arose over who "shot" first, but usually, the stronger boys determined the team members and ensured the "Arab" team's victory. Once a month, my grandfather went to the relief centre to collect supplies for our family and my uncle's family. He returned in the afternoon, followed by a cart pulled by a donkey, loaded with flour, cooking oil, and small bags of legumes. The neighbourhood children would excitedly climb onto the cart until the driver shooed them away.

My mother occasionally took my infant sister, Mariam, to the relief agency's clinic at the edge of the camp for check-ups and weighing at the child and maternal care department. Many women gathered there with their children for examinations, sitting on long wooden benches or the floor, engaging in conversation.

Every woman at the clinic would share her problems and complaints with others, finding solace in realizing that their troubles were not less significant than hers. I often accompanied my mother on these visits to the clinic. Outside, street vendors would sell sweets to earn a living. I would tug at my mother's dress, pleading for her to buy me a piece of "namoura." Despite our financial constraints due to my father's absence and my grandfather's inability to work, our financial situation was relatively stable compared to other neighbours. I sometimes saw my mother with some money, although I didn't know its exact source. I remembered seeing gold bracelets on her wrists before the war, but never saw them again afterward. My uncle Saleh, who had a textile factory with a few machines he had brought from Egypt before the occupation, would visit us occasionally. He would give my mother some money and distribute coins to us and my cousins, enabling us to buy sweets from "Abu Jaber's" nearby store. His factory continued to operate after the occupation, producing fabric sold in the sector and later in the south of the West Bank. His financial support was crucial for our family.

My mother tried to refuse his money, but he would insist, arguing that if he didn't help, who would? She would eventually accept it, tears streaming down her face as he gently chided her for crying every time.

My uncle's wife and children practically lived with us, sharing our meals and water. My grandfather asked my brother Mahmoud and cousin Hassan to demolish part of the wall separating our house from my uncle's, making it one large shared space while maintaining some privacy. My uncle's wife's family, despite their difficult situation, pressured her to remarry, arguing that since her husband had passed away, there was no reason for her to remain single. She resisted, fearing for her children's future, but they tried to convince her that her father-in-law and our family would care for them. They argued that she was still young with a future ahead and should not forgo the opportunity to remarry.

As time and years passed, our days and months continued in their course. During one of his visits, my uncle tried to give my mother some money, but she firmly refused to take it. Despite his efforts, he couldn't persuade her. Eventually, he convinced her by saying he didn't want to hire a new worker for cleaning and arranging tasks in his factory. Instead, he wanted to employ Mahmoud and Hassan, now young men, to work in the factory after school. He suggested that this money was an advance on their monthly wages. My mother agreed on the condition that they start working the following day. Mahmoud and Hassan began shouldering the responsibility of supporting the family. They would return from school at noon, leave their school bags, have lunch with the rest of us, and then head to the factory. My mother would give them long lectures on how to conduct themselves, work diligently, and keep the place clean. She would see them off and welcome them back in the evening like conquering heroes. My uncle continued to give my mother the same amount of money as before, as if it were the wages for Mahmoud and Hassan's work at his factory, where they didn't do much.

I often woke up at dawn to the sound of my grandfather making his usual supplications during his ablutions. I enjoyed listening to his sweet prayers and his recitation of Al-Fatiha and other verses from the Quran during the Fajr prayer. Over time, I almost memorized his supplications. My grandfather couldn't perform the Fajr prayer at the mosque due to the curfew still in effect at that time. Anyone caught outside risked being shot by the occupation patrols roaming or lurking around the camp. The curfew was enforced daily from 7 PM to 5 AM. My grandfather usually performed the other prayers at the mosque unless

prevented by urgent matters, such as fetching supplies or on days when the curfew was extended.

The mosque in our camp resembled a large room with a corrugated iron roof, a few windows, and a small minaret with stone steps leading up to it, where the muezzin would call to prayer. At the mosque's entrance, there was one restroom and several clay pitchers for ablution and drinking. The mosque's floor was covered with old and almost worn-out mats, and at the front, there was a small wooden pulpit with a few steps.

My grandfather often took me to the mosque before the noon prayer. Despite his slow pace and advanced age, over 70 years, I had to run to keep up with him. We would pray together before the call to prayer, and I would mimic his actions as best I could. Sheikh Hamed would check his watch before ascending the minaret to call to prayer, his voice resonating beautifully, which I found delightful.

After Sheikh Hamed finished the call, we would perform the Sunnah prayer. Only a few elderly men from the camp would join us for the Dhuhr prayer, with just me and one or two other children brought by their grandparents. It seemed my grandfather and mother had resigned themselves to the unknown fate of my father, mentioning him less frequently and realizing they had no choice but to wait.

The only significant change in our house was that my uncle's wife was compelled by her family to remarry, which wasn't easy. She would spend nights with her new husband, and my mother dutifully cared for them as she did for everyone else in our family. Though this couldn't replace the loss of a father and mother, it did provide some relief. The days continued to pass, with my grandfather performing his morning ablutions and prayers, and my mother waking up my siblings, cousins, and me for school.

My grandfather would go to the market, and my mother would start tidying up the house. I would sit beside my infant sister Mariam, fearing she might wake up and cry while my mother was busy. My grandfather would return alone, and later my siblings and cousins would come back from school. My mother would then prepare lunch for us, which we would eat together.

Then, my mother would begin her usual admonitions to my brothers Mahmoud and Hassan before bidding them farewell at the doorstep as they headed to work at my uncle's factory. Meanwhile, we would go out to play 'Arabs and Jews' or

'Seven Tiles,' and the girls would play 'Hojala' until the evening approached, and Mahmoud and Hassan would return from the factory. Life continued in this routine manner without much change.

One evening, Mahmoud and Hassan didn't return from the factory as usual. They were late and arrived with my uncle Saleh. As usual, we gathered around him; he greeted each of us warmly and handed out some coins. Then he started talking to my mother about my aunt Fathiya. She had received a marriage proposal from a group of fabric traders from a small town in the Hebron district of the West Bank, known to my uncle. My mother said the decision was his, and as long as Fathiya and he were happy with the arrangement, it was blessed. My mother then left us with my uncle, who inquired about our schooling and other matters.

After a while, my mother returned with a pot of tea, which we shared with my uncle before he left. My mother tried to persuade him to stay overnight, but he declined, saying he needed to be home with his daughters. My mother prayed for his well-being as he left, promising to inform the group about the acceptance and notify us when they planned to visit for the proposal.

The next morning, after my grandfather had finished his prayers, we heard the announcements from military jeeps declaring a curfew until further notice, warning that anyone who violated it risked death. My mother told us that there would be no school that day and forbade us from leaving the house. We stayed indoors all day, and my mother would scold anyone who even approached the door, threatening to punish them if they tried to open it.

We heard the announcement repeatedly: "Curfew in effect." My siblings and cousins had to play inside the house, and on that day, my mother prepared 'bissara' for lunch, a dish made from crushed beans and dried mallow. My siblings, cousins, and I sat studying in our schoolbooks while I looked on, flipping through their books. In the evening, we heard the loudspeakers again, reiterating the curfew and warning that anyone who disobeyed would be putting themselves in danger.

The next morning, shortly after my grandfather's prayers and supplications, the loudspeakers announced the end of the curfew from 5 AM. My mother woke everyone up and prepared them for school, and things went on as usual.

The new information that day was the reason behind the previous day's curfew. Someone had thrown a hand grenade at a patrol of the occupying forces. The

explosion injured the soldiers in the jeep, who then began firing randomly at people, resulting in numerous injuries.

Chapter Three

On Friday, my mother dressed us in the best clothes we had, which she had re-tailored from the items we received in our [UNRWA] aid package, in preparation for visiting my uncle's house to congratulate my aunt Fathiya on her upcoming engagement. We, the seven of us, accompanied her on a long walk beyond the camp boundaries, passing by the main roads patrolled by military and civilian jeeps carrying soldiers brandishing their guns at passersby. The walk was lengthy, but eventually, we reached Uncle Saleh's house, which was much better than ours – not roofed with tiles like our house, but with concrete, and its floors were tiled and electrified.

Mahmoud, my brother, knocked on the door, and it was opened by my cousin 'Warda,' who immediately recognized us and welcomed us warmly. Inside, Uncle Saleh, Aunt Fathiya, his wife, and their other daughter 'Suad' greeted us in the hallway.

Aunt Fathiya greeted and kissed each of us. My mother and siblings congratulated her on her engagement. As the adults conversed, we played and ran around. Before evening, we returned home. A few days later, after Mahmoud and Hassan returned from work, they informed my mother that Uncle Saleh had told them the group would come for Aunt Fathiya's marriage contract signing the next Friday.

Once again, my mother prepared us as she did the previous Friday. In the afternoon, we went to Uncle Saleh's house. Three cars arrived, carrying men and women. The guests entered the house, and everyone whispered about a young, fair-skinned man with a light mustache, the groom. The men sat in the living room with a red-turbaned sheikh in the middle, while the women gathered in another room. We kids were too busy playing, running around the rooms and outside, hanging around the cars. The men were occupied with the sheikh finalizing the marriage contract, and the women were busy with the bride, Aunt Fathiya. Unforgettably, we ate a lot of baklava that day, to the point where my mother worried we might get sick. They agreed to take the bride away.

Around a month later, in the deep darkness of the night, silence and stillness blanketed the impoverished homes of the camp. The only sounds were the distant barking of a dog or the meowing of a cat searching for its kitten, which a

boy had probably taken to raise in their home, hoping it would catch the mice that disturbed the family's peace. Despite the prevailing curfew and the potential dangers, Abu Hatem moved stealthily through the camp's narrow, intertwined alleys with the agility and quiet of a cat. At every new corner, he paused, cautiously looking out for any lurking or moving enemies. Once assured of the area's safety, he continued his smooth journey.

Abu Hatem, a tall, well-built man, covered his head with a keffiyeh, wrapping it around his face so that only his eyes were visible. He had been a sergeant in the Palestine Liberation Army during Egyptian rule in the Gaza Strip and had fought valiantly in the 1967 war. But what could he and a few brave souls do in an overwhelmingly losing battle? Abu Hatem knew his way around the camp streets. He paused briefly to inspect his surroundings, then headed towards a window of a house, tapping gently on the window frame - three taps, then one, followed by two. This was indeed real.

Abu Yusuf, standing by the window, whispered barely audibly, "Who's there?" Abu Hatem's voice whispered back, "It's Abu Hatem." Abu Yusuf muttered in disbelief, "It can't be (mish ma'qool)." But the reply came, "It's true, Abu Yusuf, it's true." "I'll open the door for you," Abu Yusuf murmured. Abu Hatem slipped inside as Abu Yusuf closed the door. They embraced each other warmly, with Abu Yusuf muttering, "It's unbelievable. Thank God you're safe, Abu Hatem."

Umm Yusuf, who had woken up and covered her head, came out of the room. She too approached, whispering her gratitude for Abu Hatem's safety, "Thank God you're safe, Abu Hatem. Please, come in." Abu Yusuf and Abu Hatem entered the room, and as Umm Yusuf started heading to the kitchen, Abu Hatem said, "Don't prepare any food, tea, or light the stove." Umm Yusuf turned in surprise, asking, "What's the matter, Abu Hatem? You've come to the house of the destitute?!" Abu Hatem smiled and whispered, "Bless you and your generosity, but I'm not hungry, and I don't want the sound of the stove to be heard (bless you and your kindness).

Umm Yusuf turned around and whispered, "Alright, I'll bring some bread and olives." Abu Hatem smiled and whispered back, "Okay, I know you wouldn't let me leave without eating something. That's fine, Umm Yusuf." Abu Yusuf kept smiling as Abu Hatem and he began to whisper to each other. Abu Yusuf asked, "Where have you been? I thought you were either martyred or had gone to Egypt." Abu Hatem explained that he had been injured in the clashes near the

central camps and managed to crawl to a vehicle where a Bedouin family found him. They treated his wounds, fed him, and kept him hidden until he recovered.

Umm Yusuf entered the room, whispering a greeting, which they returned. She placed a straw plate with a few loaves of bread and a dish of olives, alongside a clay water jug, then left the room to sit in the children's room by the kerosene lamp's light. It lit up the small, tile-roofed room as Abu Hatem and Abu Yusuf continued their hushed conversation, each putting his mouth close to the other's ear and then switching positions. Abu Yusuf asked, "Are any of the young men still alive?" Abu Hatem replied, "Yes, many are. I've personally seen Abu Maher in Khan Yunis, Abu Saqr in Rafah, and Abu Jihad in the central camps. We've agreed to resume the resistance anew."

Abu Yusuf, leaning closer, asked about "Al-Mukhtar". Abu Hatem whispered back that he had heard Al-Mukhtar was still alive, moving around the orchards east of Shuja'iyya and Zeitoun. He was trying to find him and might succeed in a few days. "The important thing," Abu Hatem said, "is that we must begin organizing our efforts so that resistance can simultaneously start in all areas of the Strip. The country is fine, Abu Yusuf. The youth are ready and waiting; they just need someone to arrange things and ignite the spark. We must all meet and plan our actions. Next Friday morning, 'Saleh Al-Mahmoud' will marry off his sister. The groom will take her to Hebron, leaving their house empty at night. I've arranged with Saleh to leave the key under the doorstep. A group of young men will gather there to plan our actions, and God willing, we'll start working as soon as possible. You know Saleh's house. We'll meet there next Friday after the evening prayer. Anyone who's delayed should knock on the window with the same taps."

During this, Abu Hatem had eaten a few bites of bread, each with an olive, insistently sucking on the pits in a way that showed his love for the house's owner and his longing for Umm Yusuf's food.

On Friday morning, we dressed in our best clothes and set off to Uncle Saleh's house. Despite our early arrival, we found his home bustling with people and preparations for the wedding. We, the children, got busy playing, while my sisters and other girls engaged in drumming, singing, and dancing. Mahmoud and Hassan busied themselves arranging chairs and sprinkling water on the courtyard ground to keep the dust down. My mother, along with Uncle Saleh's wife and other women, were preoccupied with preparing the bride and arranging her

suitcase of clothes. Uncle Saleh was running around, trying to manage a thousand tasks at once.

Soon after, several cars and a bus carrying the groom's family arrived. The vehicles stopped, and out stepped my aunt Fathiya's groom, Abdul-Fattah. The drumming and famous singing, but in a West Bank dialect, began as they approached the house. Uncle Saleh and a group of men came out to welcome them, with men greeting men and women greeting women warmly. The women entered the living room, while the men sat in the yard. Baklava was served on plates, with Mahmoud being the most active distributor. Red drinks were offered to the guests, and the sound of drumming and women singing echoed throughout. This went on for about an hour, with Uncle Saleh constantly talking to the groom and his father.

Then, Uncle Saleh went inside to get ready. The groom and his father stood at the door, and as the drumming and singing continued, Uncle Saleh reappeared, holding Aunt Fathiya by the arm. She was dressed in a white suit and veil, looking more beautiful than ever. They slowly walked to the door, where the groom took her arm, amidst the women's ululations. The couple walked towards one of the decorated cars, followed by everyone else. My mother stayed close to Uncle Saleh and his wife. The couple got into the car, and the rest of us, including the women, boarded the cars and the bus. My mother, looking for Mahmoud, shouted for him to return home with his siblings and stay with our grandfather. She would take his siblings with her and return the next day. Everything was ready at home, and she instructed Mahmoud to take care of our grandfather and cousins, lock the door before the curfew, and not open it until sunrise. Mahmoud nodded, understanding his role, as usual. Fatima was holding baby Mariam. My mother, Uncle Saleh's wife, my sisters, and his daughters got into one of the cars. Mahmoud then gathered us near our grandfather, who stood leaning on his cane.

After everyone had boarded the cars and Uncle Saleh and the groom's father had organized things, Uncle Saleh excused himself to go back and lock the house, asking them to wait a little. He hurried back to the house, took a bag from the kitchen, placed it in the guest room, and then locked the front door. He dropped something from his hand, bent down to pick it up, and secretly placed the house key under the doorstep before joining everyone in the car and driving off. The sounds of drumming and singing continued until they faded into the distance, and we returned home with our grandfather.

We arrived just before sunset, exhausted from a day filled with play, food, and joy. Mahmoud securely locked the door, and we fell into a deep sleep. The night enveloped Gaza in its dark curtain, and the streets were silent except for the occasional distant dog barking or a cat meowing, searching for its kitten snatched away by a child to be raised at home, hoping it would grow to catch the rats that troubled the family. Despite the curfew and the dangers posed by patrolling occupation forces, Abu Hatem skillfully navigated through the camp's narrow, tangled alleys. He was a tall, agile man, with his face mostly covered by a keffiyeh, revealing only his eyes. A sergeant in the Palestine Liberation Army during the Egyptian rule in the Gaza Strip, he had fought bravely in the '67 war.

That Friday, Abu Hatem and six other men quietly entered Uncle Saleh's house, retrieving the key hidden under the doorstep. They didn't turn on any lights until everyone was inside and the curtains and blankets were secured over the windows to prevent any light from escaping. Inside, they found the bag of food and sweets Uncle Saleh had left, and Abu Hatem muttered appreciatively about Saleh's generosity. They sat in a tight circle, whispering for hours into the night, taking turns to keep watch. As dawn approached, they left the house one by one, with Abu Hatem being the last. He locked the door, placed the key back under the doorstep, and they set off, reciting "And We have put before them a barrier and behind them a barrier and covered them, so they do not see."

I woke up to the sound of my grandfather praying Fajr. Mahmoud woke up early to take on the role of both parents, waking up his brothers Hassan and Mohammed, and our cousins Hassan and Ibrahim. He prepared breakfast for them before they all headed off to school, leaving me and my grandfather alone at home.

On that day, my grandfather didn’t go to the market, and he took me out to sit under the warm sunshine when it was high in the sky. After a while, he began to tell me about his youth and the country that was lost. Then he took out his small pouch, gave me a coin, and said, “Go buy yourself something and come back quickly.” I rushed to Abu Khalil's shop, bought a few sweet and sour candies, and returned to my grandfather, popping one into my mouth. He asked me what I had bought, so I showed him and offered him one. He laughed heartily and said, “No, these are for you, my dear.” I sat next to him, enjoying the sun and sucking on the candies.

As noon approached, my grandfather stood up, leaning on his cane, and said, “Come on, Ahmed, let’s go to the mosque for the Dhuhr prayer.” He held my

hand, and we set off. At the mosque, my grandfather performed ablutions, and I mimicked him while he looked at me smilingly. Sheikh Hamed arrived and, smiling at my grandfather, said, “God willing, this boy will be religious.” My grandfather murmured in agreement, “Insha’Allah (God willing).”

The days passed similarly, but I began to understand more about what was happening around me. The new development was the resurgence of the resistance. Every day, there were shootings at occupation patrols, grenade throwing, or explosive detonations. The occupying soldiers responded with extreme force and violence against unarmed civilians, shooting randomly, causing deaths and injuries. Then reinforcements would arrive, imposing curfews, and summoning men to the school where the soldiers would beat and humiliate them, and arrest some. These scenes, sounds, and actions repeated for several days. The resistance grew stronger and bolder, to the point where we would see masked men in kufiyas carrying English rifles or Carl Gustav guns, or grenades, roaming the camp’s alleys, especially near evening.

It became normal for us, and we realized that the nightly curfew was just a farce that didn’t fool us children, our mothers, or the simple folks. The resistance men would dominate the camp at night, making it impossible for the occupation patrols to enter its alleys. They stayed on the main streets, and with the break of dawn, the resistance men would disappear.

The summer break arrived, and my mother enrolled me in school. She bought me a pair of used shoes from the market's used shoe stalls. They were repainted to look new, and I loved their red color, as did my grandfather. My mother also made me a small school bag from old clothes, and I was all set for school. I was excited about everything I'd heard about school – the morning assembly, the classes, the teachers, and the breaks between lessons.

Just before the end of summer, a resistance fighter ambushed an occupation patrol in an alley overlooking the main street, throwing a grenade at their jeep. The explosion injured several soldiers, and the jeep crashed into a nearby wall. The injured soldiers' cries were followed by random gunfire, and reinforcements soon arrived, announcing a curfew over loudspeakers. People rushed into their homes, and soldiers stormed into houses on the camp's edges, beating men, women, and children brutally.

The loudspeakers called all men aged 18 to 60 to gather at the school, as usual. However, voices soon cried out, urging everyone not to leave their homes, as the

resistance fighters filled the camp, ready to confront the soldiers. Only the men from houses on the camp's outskirts, which were easier for the soldiers to reach, left for the school. When the soldiers attempted to enter the camp, they were met with gunfire from the narrow, winding alleys and were forced to retreat. Those who had gone to the school were beaten and humiliated before being allowed to return home. The curfew lasted a full week, during which we subsisted on beans, lentils, and olives. Despite the fear, the food tasted better than anything we had since the occupation began, as we felt a sense of pride under the protection of the resistance's guns.

After the first two days of the curfew, people began to venture outside, sitting by their doorsteps in the narrow alleys deep within the camp, where the occupation forces couldn't easily reach them without being intercepted by the resistance fighters lurking in the camp's corners. I saw many resistance fighters, unrecognizable in their keffiyehs, armed and stationed behind walls and corners.

I noticed some of our neighbours sitting around a corner, drinking tea, smoking rolled cigarettes, and discussing their fears and feelings. They expressed a sense of dignity and pride, long suppressed by the occupation, but also apprehension about the uncertain future. Would the situation remain the same, or would the camp be stormed by a large force, shelled, or even burned to the ground with its inhabitants inside? Opinions varied, but the dominant sentiment was the necessity to stand firm. The common refrain was, "What do we have to lose? We only have our chains and the UNRWA houses. Why fear?" Every conversation ended with the same conclusion: "A minute of living with dignity and pride is better than a thousand years of a miserable life under the boots of the occupation."

This wasn't only in our camp but in all camps across the Gaza Strip, in the streets of towns and villages, both in the West Bank and Gaza. The resistance began to gain momentum across the nation. Some were organized, but many were individual acts or local initiatives by the nation's free men. We started hearing about the remarkable resistance in the nearby Jabalia Camp, led by Abu Hatim. Dozens of young men and adults from the camp and neighbouring areas had joined him, and the camp became known as "the Camp of Revolution" (Mukhayyam al-Thawra). The news spread like wildfire, increasing the happiness and morale of the people. As children, this even affected our games; the game of "Arabs and Jews" became a daily activity, with a prevailing rule that the Arabs would always triumph over their enemies.

Chapter Four

Throughout the night, I was either preparing for school, talking about it, asking my siblings about various aspects of it, or dreaming about it, because tomorrow would be my first day. Before going to bed, I had gone to our small wardrobe and started trying on my clothes and my new shoes. When my mother saw me, she shouted, "What are you doing, Ahmad?" I replied softly, "I'm getting ready for school." She laughed and said, "There's still plenty of time before school in the morning."

In the early morning, I woke up to my grandfather's prayers and couldn't sleep afterward. As soon as my mother woke up, I jumped out of bed to get ready for school. After a while, she woke up my siblings and sent my brother Mahmoud to wake up my cousins in the other room, where they slept with my grandfather. My cousins got dressed, and my mother dressed me up as if I were going to my own wedding. She gave me a lot of advice, praising me for being smart, grown-up, and brave. Then she gave each of us a shilling, which was five agorot of the Israeli pound, and placed a piece of bread in our completely empty school bags.

My mother repeatedly instructed Mahmoud to take good care of me. Mohammed was in the third grade and at the same school as me, the Male Refugees Elementary School A. My sister Maha was in the fifth grade at the Female Refugees Elementary School B, and my brother Hassan was in the first grade of intermediate at the Male Refugees Intermediate School A. My sister Fatima was in the third grade of intermediate at the Female Refugees Intermediate School A. My brother Mahmoud was in the second year of high school at Carmel School. My cousin Ibrahim was in the second grade of primary at my school, and my cousin Hassan was in the first year of high school at Carmel School.

We all left the house together, with Mohammed holding one of my hands and my cousin Ibrahim the other, while my cloth school bag hung around my neck. We started our journey to the schools and eventually split up into different groups, with the three of us staying together.

The streets were bustling with boys and girls of all ages on their way to school. The boys wore a variety of colored and shaped clothes, while the girls wore a

uniform called "al-Murayyol," a blue and white striped fabric with each stripe being half a centimeter thick. They tied their hair with white ribbons, and what distinguished us boys were our closely shaven heads.

Upon entering the school, we found a very large courtyard with tall trees and many rooms around it. Near the entrance, there was a small garden with flowers and plants and a pond. My brother Mohammad started to acquaint me with the school; this is first grade A, this is B, and this is C, these are the second grade rooms, these are the third... This is the teachers' room, the principal's office, the canteen, the bathrooms, and the drinking fountains. The morning bell rang, and the teachers started to organize the student lines. The older students quickly formed their lines, but we, the new first graders, were gathered by the teachers who started calling our names. As each name was called, the child would stand to one side until we were divided into three groups, each led by a teacher.

Our teacher was an elderly sheikh wearing a robe and a fez, indicating he was an Azhar-educated scholar. We entered the first-grade classroom (A), where he began to arrange us by height, shortest first, into three groups with three people each. Three students sat on a wooden bench over a meter long and about twenty-five centimetres wide, with a board in front of us of the same length and about forty centimetres wide for our books and notebooks. Underneath was another plank where we placed our bags, all held together with wooden supports to form a single unit called a "bank."

There were three rows of these benches in the classroom, each row with about seven benches, and each bench sat three students. There was a space of about a meter and a half between each row. In the centre of the room, in front of the benches, was the teacher's table and chair, and on the wall was a blackboard, which we called "al-loh".

Each of us sat in the middle of the bench assigned by our teacher, Sheikh Hassan, who introduced himself and got to know each of us one by one. We each said our names, and Sheikh Hassan would ask about our fathers, uncles, and grandfathers. He seemed to know everyone's family, which was evident when he made a special prayer for my father's safe return, knowing that my father was missing and his whereabouts unknown.

Soon, they brought us books, notebooks, pens, and erasers. Sheikh Hassan distributed these items to us. We each received a reading book with beautiful colored pictures and incomprehensible text, a math book, a part of the Quran,

five notebooks, pencils, and an eraser. The notebooks, covered in green and red with the United Nations Education Department - UNESCO logo, were something new to us. Sheikh Hassan explained everything to us: “This is the reading book, this is the math book, keep three of the notebooks at home. We will use one for reading and one for math." He then beautifully wrote each of our names on our items with a black ink pen.

The school day ended, and Mohammad and my cousin Ibrahim took me back home. We each carried our cloth bags filled with stationery. As days passed, I began learning to read, write, and do arithmetic. I started memorizing short Chapters of the Quran like the other students. We went to school together, played during the breaks, eating sandwiches made by our mother with thyme or ground pepper, and occasionally jam. Sometimes, we bought some labneh from the women sitting at the school gate, savoring its delicious tangy taste.

Back home, we would have lunch, then Mohammad and Hassan would head to Uncle Saleh's factory. Our time was divided between playing in the neighbourhood and studying. In the evenings, we gathered around an upturned washing basin with a lamp in the middle. Each of us would place our book or notebook on it, bending over as we sat on the ground to complete our homework. My mother and the others who didn’t study sat beside us, chatting.

As the weeks passed, the sound of loudspeakers announcing curfews became a regular occurrence, signalling that one of the freedom fighters had carried out an operation against the occupation forces, usually involving a grenade attack or a shooting at a patrol. A significant event that year was the martyrdom of our neighbour Abu Yousuf. He, along with two other young men, had set out to execute a mission against the occupation patrols. Their strategy involved one of the fighters throwing a grenade at the patrol that regularly passed through the main street at a specific time, then retreating in a way that made him visible to the soldiers. Abu Yousuf and another fighter, armed with Carl Gustav rifles and grenades, lay in wait for the reinforcements that would pursue the first attacker. Unfortunately, they were ambushed unexpectedly from behind, and both Abu Yousuf and his comrade Ibrahim were martyred on the spot.

This time, the occupation forces did not impose a curfew on the camp. The entire camp, men and women, young and old, emerged from their homes, many grieving for Abu Yousuf. A majestic funeral procession was held, attended by all the camp's residents who chanted in solidarity with the martyr and Palestine. The

crowd circled the camp several times with the coffins before burying the martyrs in the nearby cemetery.

That afternoon, my grandfather took me to a corner of our neighbourhood where some men and elders gathered to talk and entertain themselves while discussing current events. The topic of the day was the martyrdom of Abu Yousuf and his companions. Everyone was astonished by the event, and there were discussions about the possibility of betrayal, as the attack came from an unexpected direction.

Days later, as the sun was setting and the usual curfew was about to begin, we were playing in the neighbourhood when several masked and armed freedom fighters filled the area, each taking up positions at the ends of the alleys. Abu Hatem, one of the camp's notable men, arrived, dragging a man in a despicable and shameful state. Abu Hatem, armed with a bamboo stick and a rifle slung over his shoulder, stood over the man who tried to hide his face and cower as much as possible. We all stopped playing, and the neighbourhood residents gathered around, watching the scene unfold.

In an eerie silence broken only by the commanding voice of Abu Hatem, the events unfolded in a dramatic and chilling manner. "People, you all know Abu Yousuf, the leader of the Popular Liberation Forces in the camp. You've heard of his heroics and operations that made us all proud and disciplined the occupiers. And you all know this despicable man," he gestured towards a figure, "a spy for the Jews, the one who monitored Abu Yousuf and informed the Israeli army about him."

The crowd murmured incoherently, their words unclear and inaudible. Abu Hatem, raising his stick high, demanded the traitor to confess before everyone. Under the threat of further beatings, the man, crouching and shielding his head with his hands, admitted to betraying Abu Yousuf and his companions for a small sum of money, claiming he didn't know they would be killed. The crowd's anger erupted, cursing the traitor as Abu Hatem silenced them with a gesture.

"Listen, people! These Jews have occupied our land, driven us from our homes, killed our men, and violated our dignity. And yet, there are those among us ready to betray the very freedom fighters who risk their lives for us. What should be the punishment for a traitor who collaborates with the Jews?" The unanimous cry was for death.

Abu Hatem then took his rifle off his shoulder, aimed it at the spy's head, and as my mother covered my eyes, I struggled to see. But I heard the gunshots and the crowd's vengeful cries: "Death to the traitors! Death to the agents!"

The next day, fueled by the martyrs' blood, the freedom fighters ambushed an occupation patrol. As the jeep arrived, they hurled grenades and showered it with bullets, killing and injuring several soldiers before they could even retaliate. The occupation forces sent massive reinforcements, surrounding the area and brutally dragging people out of their homes. The men were lined up against a wall, guns pointed at their heads, as the beatings and humiliations continued relentlessly.

The intelligence officer responsible for the area arrived and began a meticulous inspection of the men, calling them one by one to his car. With his car door open, he interrogated each man under the threat of rifles pointed at them, bombarding them with questions in hopes of unearthing any information about the freedom fighters.

Days later, when the curfew was finally lifted, we resumed our school routine. During a break, I ventured to the restrooms where I found boys climbing a wall to peek at the nearby preparatory school where my brother Hasan studied. Joining them, I saw older students, much taller and seemingly more mature than myself.

That day, on our way home amidst hundreds of students, I spotted my cousin Hasan at a distance. Between us was a throng of pupils. To my shock, I saw him raise his hand to his mouth, appearing to smoke a cigarette. I tightened my grip on the hands of my brother Mahmood and cousin Ibrahim, who looked at me puzzled. Pointing towards Hasan, they failed to understand my concern. By the time they noticed, Hasan had disposed of the cigarette, and we had reached our destination. Opting for silence, I feared his retaliation.

Back home, seizing a moment alone with my mother, I whispered, "I saw cousin Hasan smoking!" She looked at me sharply, dismissing my claim as a mistake or illusion, and instructed me not to mention it to anyone. That evening, I noticed her quietly confronting Hasan, but their conversation remained inaudible to me.

Days later, Mahmood informed my mother that Hasan had skipped school that day. I saw the confusion on her face, wondering how to address this new challenge. The situation with Hasan remained an unsolved puzzle in our household.

I witnessed my mother speaking intensely with my grandfather, calling cousin Hasan over for a stern talk. Despite Hasan's attempts to defend himself, they threatened to tie him to a post in the yard and beat him if he skipped school again. Days later, my mother found cigarettes and some money in Hasan's pants. She presented them to my grandfather, who was astonished and wondered how Hasan got the money. When Hasan was called to explain, he faltered under my mother's interrogation, unable to justify his actions.

My grandfather, weakened by age and worry, couldn't do much. My mother took charge, interrogating Hasan, who initially tried to dodge the questions. When faced with the evidence, Hasan admitted to stealing the money from my grandfather's purse. Outraged, my mother and grandfather decided to tie him to the post as punishment. My grandfather, upon realizing Hasan had taken half of the family's expenses, weakly instructed to tie him up.

My mother looked at my grandfather, seeking confirmation. He nodded affirmatively, his eyes glancing at us, indicating that it was essential for us children to see the consequences of such actions. The message was clear: wrongdoing must be met with appropriate discipline to set an example for the younger generation.

My mother tied Hasan to the post while lamenting her and Hasan's misfortune. "Oh, the tragedy of you, the son of a martyr! Do you understand what a martyr is, Hasan? Your father was a martyr, and you steal half of what's in your grandfather's purse? Half of our family's living expenses, Hasan! Shame on you," she cried out in despair.

Then, she shouted at all of us, commanding us to go inside the room. Without hesitation, we all obeyed.

That night, a curfew was imposed not only by the occupying forces outside but also by my mother within our home. She forbade us from leaving the room all night, except for emergencies, and forced us to go to bed early. The atmosphere was heavy with a mix of disappointment and discipline, a stark reminder of the consequences of wrong choices.

Chapter Five

My aunt Fathiya and her husband paid us a visit. My mother received my aunt with kisses and longing, and Aunt Fathiya began to kiss each of us in turn. While my mother prepared the guest bedding, she called out to Grandfather Abu Ibrahim to welcome the visitors. Grandfather emerged from his room to greet Aunt Fathiya's husband, who brought a straw basket filled with several paper bags, which he handed to my mother.

Fatima prepared tea, and they all enjoyed it together. Then, Aunt Fathiya's husband excused himself to go to Uncle Saleh's house, leaving Aunt Fathiya to stay with us for the night. He promised to return the next day to accompany her back. Despite Grandfather's insistence that he stay with us, he politely declined, citing some urgent matters to attend to.

After he left, Grandfather returned to his room, and my mother, Aunt Fathiya, and we children gathered around her. My mother brought out the basket and started unpacking its contents. Inside one of the bags were large, red apples the likes of which we had never seen or tasted before. Another bag contained unfamiliar fruit, which I later learned was peaches, and the third had pieces of dried milk.

Looking at Aunt Fathiya, my mother said, "You shouldn't have troubled yourself, Fathiya." Tears welled up in Aunt Fathiya's eyes as she responded, "I wish I could do more to help you, my dear sister." She explained that her husband's financial situation was good, for which she was thankful. My mother then washed the fruits and handed about half of the apples and peaches to Mahmoud, instructing him to take them to Grandfather and our cousins in the other room.

Mother and Aunt Fathiya chatted late into the night, with us children joyfully surrounding them. Aunt Fathiya's husband, Abdul Fattah, went to Uncle Saleh's house, where they spent the night discussing the situation in the Hebron area, the city, and the surrounding towns and villages. Abdul Fattah had completed his high school studies a few years earlier and was helping his father in farming and sheep breeding. He was considering going abroad for university studies in Jordan or Saudi Arabia.

Uncle Saleh was curious about the resistance, the fighters, people's living conditions, and their morale during the three years since the Israeli occupation.

Since the occupation of Hebron, large groups of tourists began flocking to the city, particularly to visit the Ibrahimi Mosque, believed by Jews to hold historical significance for them. This influx of tourists sparked an economic revival in Hebron. Many local merchants seized the opportunity, opening their stores to offer various goods to the visitors, often at high prices. They even sold oak galls, which foreigners considered sacred from the land of Abraham.

The economic boom didn't stop with the tourists; Jews also came to Hebron to shop for various items, contributing further to the city's economic vitality. Notably, the Israeli soldiers maintained a respectful distance from the locals, seemingly following a request from the city's mayor, Sheikh Ja'abari. He had met with Israeli leaders, including Moshe Dayan, after the occupation, urging them to ensure their soldiers did not violate the people's honor or property. The leaders, recognizing the importance of this, advised their soldiers to minimize interaction with the locals.

The residents of Hebron, still reeling from the shock of the Six-Day War defeat, were largely fearful of the occupation and the Jews. Jews could roam the city without encountering resistance or hostility, as the people, fearing repercussions, would prevent any acts of aggression against them.

Despite the prevalent fear and caution, occasional resistance activities occurred. These were sporadic and included sniping or throwing grenades at Israeli patrols on the city's outskirts or in surrounding villages. While Israeli forces frequently entered many areas, some fighters living in the mountains and caves engaged in guerrilla warfare against the patrols, causing injuries and, on rare occasions, fatalities. These fighters would then retreat to the rugged terrain, which was unfamiliar and daunting to the Israeli forces. Among these resistance fighters, one named "Abu Sharar" became particularly notorious, haunting the occupying soldiers in the area.

The Fatah movement was attempting to organize resistance activities in Hebron and its surrounding areas, but successes were limited. The Israeli forces were quick to arrest groups that either initiated resistance efforts or were in their early stages. The focus of the locals on their daily lives and economic activities seemed to impede the resistance from becoming a significant and widespread phenomenon in the region.

However, a series of political protests organized mainly by Fatah supporters, particularly among students, began emerging in the city. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) also attempted to initiate activities. Given the limited success in armed resistance, the focus shifted more towards political activism, social initiatives, and community engagement.

During the discussions between my uncle and Abdel Fattah, my uncle was keen to understand the differences between the situations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In Gaza, the Popular Liberation Forces, consisting of officers and fighters from the disbanded Palestine Liberation Army post-1967 war, were the primary resistance group. Despite Israeli forces achieving some success in assassinating leaders and infiltrating deeper into Gaza, resistance groups, including Fatah and PFLP, maintained a reasonably high level of activity.

Days after my aunt's visit, a rumor spread in the neighbourhood about a young woman's body found in the Mishat area. The body was discovered, and rumors circulated that she was an informant killed on that suspicion. While no one dared to openly challenge this narrative or inquire into the details, whispers and murmurs suggested she might not have been an informant. Some speculated that individuals posing as resistance fighters took advantage of her, violated her, and then killed her to avoid exposure, falsely labeling her as an informant. This incident highlighted the intensified efforts by Israeli intelligence to infiltrate the Palestinian community, exploiting vulnerabilities like poverty and need to recruit informants who could provide information on resistance fighters and their activities.

The occupation forces carried out large-scale arrests of men and young adults, transferring them to the Saraya building, the intelligence headquarters. There, they were greeted by a large number of soldiers who beat, slapped, and kicked them. Their eyes were blindfolded, and they were made to stand with their faces against the wall, hands tied behind their backs, for long hours in the rain and severe cold, shivering from cold, anticipation, or fear. Soldiers stood behind them, taking turns on patrols, kicking and hitting anyone who leaned against the wall or moved right or left. In a nearby room, a number of Shin Bet officers (as it was called at the time) sat in a well-lit, air-conditioned room. They summoned the men one by one, seated them on chairs in front of them, and lifted the blindfolds, bombarding them with thousands of questions about their work, hometown, family, brothers, each of their neighbours, and about resistance fighters. They hurled hundreds of insults and curses, some of the foulest and most vulgar

language imaginable, breaking the Arabic language they spoke. Sometimes they would hit, other times they would joke, alternating between intimidation and enticement in search of any information the men might have or any readiness among them to cooperate, or any weakness that could be exploited to force them to collaborate against their people.

Some of the men were seething with anger and helplessness in the face of this humiliation, but what could they do? Any action would only lead to more humiliation and oppression. Some burst out in rage, wanting to attack the scum, only to find their hands tied behind their backs and facing even more degradation. Others tried to get through the crisis as best as they could, wishing to live peacefully, neither with nor against them, nor with or against the resistance, just wanting to live and provide for their families. A few sold their souls cheaply to the occupiers, beginning to provide all the information they knew about the resistance and its men, agreeing to deal with them.

The situation of the resistance in the Gaza Strip was noticeably stronger than in the West Bank, primarily due to the presence of a battalion of fighters called the Palestine Liberation Army, established as a military force by the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Arab regimes at the time had pushed for its creation to alleviate their responsibility towards Palestine. With the 1967 war, this army partly disbanded; some were martyred, and others, the majority, left the sector for Egypt or were deported there. Some stayed in Gaza and formed the Popular Liberation Forces, initiating the resistance. Then, some groups and cells from Fatah and the Popular Front began operating in the sector, increasingly present, especially in the refugee camp areas.

One day, while we were in the morning line-up at school, a great commotion arose, followed by loud chants of "With our souls, with our blood, we will redeem you, Palestine! With our souls, with our blood, we will redeem you, Palestine!" Schools emptied, and students from different schools joined together in a crowd, echoing the chants and cries. Everyone was in great joy and overwhelming happiness, as that day coincided with the Day of Dignity when Palestinian fedayeen in Jordan successfully repelled an Israeli attack on the Jordanian front. The demonstrations roamed the streets of the camp, chanting slogans and waving flags, before eventually dispersing as we returned to our homes. Everyone felt the utmost pride and dignity. After the setback of 1967, what people commonly referred to according to the official Arab regime's terminology, this was the first victory over the Israeli occupation army. From among the fedayeen groups

camping on the eastern bank of the Jordan River in the Karama area, some had started carrying out cross-border fedayeen operations.

That afternoon, as usual, I sat with my grandfather in the square near the corner of our house, where the men of the neighbourhood gathered to talk. They were all extremely elated, and words like the Palestinian revolution and the name of the National Liberation Movement (Fatah) started to resonate. It was clear that Fatah was beginning to take a leading position in the Palestinian national movement and resistance to the occupation. That day, I heard some men say, "Uncle, true words don't plow the land; only its bulls do. We used to rely on the Arab armies and were defeated. But the first time we fight ourselves, we win, despite our limited means and weak arms," and all the men nodded in agreement, supporting this sentiment. In the following days, the pace of fedayeen operations inside the occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza increased. As my mother always used to say, "The spirit of men revives men." It seemed as if the victory of the Battle of Karama had rekindled many souls with hope and readiness.

It appears that the intelligence of the occupation had gathered information indicating that many of the operations happening in Gaza originated from Al-Shati Camp. Consequently, a curfew was imposed on our camp. This time, the curfew lasted much longer, exceeding three weeks and even a month, and our conditions in the camp worsened significantly. The camp had been under curfew for a month.

Life continued as usual just tens of meters away in the city. The noon call to prayer rose from the minarets of the mosques in Gaza. Al-Abbas Mosque, located on the main street of the city, Omar Al-Mukhtar Street, saw a number of men and young adults gathering to perform the prayer.

After completing their prayers, a confident young man in his early twenties stood before them. He praised Allah, blessed His Prophet, and then began addressing the people, stirring in them strength and chivalry towards their brothers in Al-Shati Camp, where a curfew had been imposed for a month. An elder asked, "What can we do, my son?" The young man replied that they could at least hold a solidarity demonstration. The congregants in the mosque exited, chanting and praising, with some carrying the young man on their shoulders, chanting, "With our souls, with our blood, we will redeem you, Palestine... We are all Palestine, migrants and citizens."

People began joining the large demonstration, and the city streets near the camp were close by. Occupation soldiers' vehicles monitored the situation from a distance, prepared for emergencies but without intervening. The demonstration dispersed, and everyone felt they had done something their conscience demanded. The next morning, loudspeakers announced the end of the curfew in the camp, allowing life to return to normal.

In the morning, we lined up in the school yard. After some light physical exercises and a morning speech delivered by one of the students from atop the stone stairs in front of the line-up, we proceeded one class after another to the milk kiosk, a closed area on three sides with stone walls, roofed with zinc sheets. On its cement platform stood several large tables, behind which four men in blue overalls and white caps stood. We entered the kiosk in a line, supervised by our teachers. The men handed us one by one iron cups filled with milk, after giving each of us a fish oil pill, instructing us to swallow it and then drink the hot milk.

We drank the milk and threw the cups into a large pot of boiling water, then left our queue for our classrooms. All students in all UNRWA schools drank milk and fish oil on different days. We detested fish oil with a blind hatred. Teachers watched us to ensure we didn't discard those small pills, forcing us to take them and urging us to drink the milk quickly and go to our classes.

Fish oil is very beneficial, but the hot milk is just okay, with the best part being the warmth of the cup. When you hold it in your tiny hands, which are almost frozen in the severe cold, you typically feel as though your hands have become part of your body again after having felt detached.

On one of those days, the weather was extremely cold and stormy, and most of us got wet from the rain on our way to school. After we had our milk, we entered our classroom and sat at our desks, shivering. Our teacher, Sheikh Ali, entered and seemed to realize that we were not in a state to study, read, or understand. He wanted to make us laugh, so he said, "Children, imagine if the sky were raining rice and meat right now!" There was a commotion in the class, and we forgot about the cold and wetness as we heard about rice and meat. We started talking chaotically, "I will eat only the meat... I love rice... I... I."

Sheikh Ali let us indulge in our playful fantasies of rice and meat for a few minutes. Then he shouted at us, "Quiet, you and him! May God make it rain locusts to bite you all at once!" He then instructed us, "Take out your reading book, open it to Lesson Twenty. Read, Ahmad." I opened my water-soaked book

and began reading, shivering from the cold. Sheikh Ali's lips muttered, "There is no power or strength except through Allah... Indeed, to Allah we belong and to Him we shall return. You must learn so you can become 'humans' (meaning civilized or educated people)."

Chapter Six

My aunt Fathiya lives in the village of Surif in the Hebron district, a Palestinian village like all the others in our homeland that fell under occupation in 1967. It bore its share of estrangement and destruction as punishment for its role in the resistance prior to the occupation, and in the battles preceding 1948. Being a border village located on the Green Line, it lies between the territories occupied in 1948 and those that remained under Jordanian rule until 1967.

Shortly after the occupation, patrols approached the village and entered it, roaming around like most other Palestinian villages throughout the West Bank. The residents live in small, modest, yet beautiful stone houses among olive, fig, grape, and almond trees. They raise livestock and poultry, earning their livelihood, and are thankful to Allah for His countless blessings. The men of the village, known for their chivalry and masculinity, wear traditional Palestinian rural attire. You would see a man strutting with his stick, watching his sheep graze on the hillside, and the modest women are known for their character, their clothes, and their head coverings.

My aunt didn't feel much difference after moving from Gaza to Surif, except for the rural and agricultural environment. The nature of the people, their customs, and the purity of their souls were the same, although the local dialect was slightly different, but not vastly so. She quickly adapted to life there. Her husband, Abdul Fattah, had completed his secondary education at Tariq bin Ziyad School in Hebron. In Surif, like all the surrounding villages, there was no secondary school, so those who wanted to complete their secondary education had to study in Hebron. Abdul Fattah's studies in Hebron made him well-acquainted with the city and its happenings, and he had many friends from the city and other villages who studied with him at that school. Aunt Fathiya was blessed with a son whom she named Abdul Rahim. My mother couldn't travel to Hebron to congratulate my aunt on her new baby and settled for going to my uncle's house to congratulate him. She asked him to extend her congratulations to Fathiya when he visited her and apologize on her behalf, as she was aware of our financial situation and the family's circumstances.

My aunt Fathiya's husband, Abdul Fattah, was preparing to study at the University of Jordan, Faculty of Sharia, but his father's severe illness led him to postpone his

plans. Later, his father's death made him abandon the idea of university education altogether. He decided to take over his father's business, dealing in fabrics, in addition to managing the family-owned land. He consoled himself over his uncompleted education by facilitating his brother Abdul Rahman's education, who was in his second year of high school at Tariq bin Ziyad School in Hebron. Like most surrounding villages, Surif had no secondary school, so those wishing to complete their education had to go to Hebron. Abdul Fattah's education in Hebron had given him a good understanding of the city and its events, and he had many friends from the city and other villages who had studied with him.

Abdul Fattah often stood on the roof of their house, pointing westward to the ruins of 'Alyn, where the Holy Jihad fighters had camped before the 1967 occupation. He told how the villagers had provided them with whatever they needed. He recounted an incident where a local from Surif, Mohammad Abdul Wahab "Al-Qadi", while grazing his sheep in a nearby area called 'Snaheen', spotted a convoy of Jews coming from Beit Shemesh to Etzion. He informed the mujahideen, who quickly set up an ambush in an area called 'Dahr Al-Hajja'. When the convoy arrived, they attacked and killed all of them, 35 officers, soldiers, and doctors. This incident filled the Jews with hatred towards Surif, and when the 1967 occupation occurred, the Jews bombarded Surif with artillery, destroying many homes, driven solely by vengeance for that incident.

Through his work and connections in Hebron, Abdul Fattah developed a vast network of relationships with its merchants and businesspeople. In their gatherings and meetings, they would have long discussions and detailed dialogues about everything. They would sit in one of those stores, huddled around a heater, the coals glowing inside, sipping tea and talking about the resistance and the occupation. These incidents always reflected a disbelief among these segments of the population in the feasibility of resistance and the practical benefits that could come from it, fearing more harm than good. Their primary concern was to improve their standard of living, economic gain, and wealth development. The prevailing belief was that all the Arab armies combined had failed to stand against the Israeli army, so how could groups of fedayeen with their simple weapons and limited capabilities stand a chance?

Abdul Fattah did not dare to openly contradict their opinions, but he listened to them and tried to discuss the matters objectively and logically. In the end, the gathering would disperse after having sat for an hour or so, sipping tea, often ending with someone saying, "What do we have to do with this matter? Leave the

creation to the Creator, and God will bring what is best." They spoke in the distinctive Hebron dialect, elongating certain letters more than others.

In these gatherings and circles, Abdul Fattah, my aunt's husband, became acquainted with "Abu Ali", who seemed more convinced about the necessity of doing something about the cause. He believed that even if the resistance wasn't effective in liberating the homeland or repelling the occupation, it was undoubtedly a fulfillment of the national duty at the very least.

Abdul Fattah and Abu Ali often walked the streets of Hebron during Abdul Fattah's visits there, or in Surif when Abu Ali came to visit. They would engage in conversations about the occupation, the necessity of resisting it, and the importance of not just accepting the status quo or focusing solely on making money, developing wealth, and building homes. Since their thoughts were similar, their friendship grew stronger. One day, Abu Ali confided in Abdul Fattah, saying that he couldn't remain idle without doing the minimum of his duty. Abdul Fattah asked what he planned to do. Would he look for a weapon to attack an occupation patrol and then flee to live with wanted men like Abu Sharar and other mujahideen fighters? Abu Ali replied that this wasn't his aspiration. Instead, he wanted to organize the resistance into a phenomenon, a movement, an organization. He planned to travel to Jordan and present his idea to Fatah there, knowing that Fatah, especially after the victory in the Battle of Karameh, had gained significant status and would likely welcome his idea and provide assistance.

Abdul Fattah praised the idea and assured Abu Ali to take the utmost precautions. He told Abu Ali that he could consider him a full partner in all his steps. They agreed that Abu Ali would travel alone, covering his trip with a business pretext to avoid drawing attention.

Jordan, at this time after the victory in Karameh, was wholly under the influence of the resistance. The refugee camps were filled with celebrations of victory. Everyone was chanting in praise of the fedayeen and praying for the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, the name behind that victory. It was not difficult for someone like Abu Ali to quickly find the leadership of the fedayeen action there and agree with them to start organizing military cells for Fatah in all areas of the West Bank. He would be provided with money and weapons to establish and train these cells for armed resistance.

After visiting some relatives and conducting some business transactions in Jordan as a cover for his official mission, Abu Ali returned to the West Bank. There, he

began his contacts with many of his acquaintances, especially the youth, in various cities of the West Bank.

Abu Ali organized individuals into the ranks of the Fatah movement, asking each of them to recruit two or three trusted friends ready for armed action against the occupation. This network spread across cities from the northernmost part of the West Bank to Hebron and even some villages and towns. Whenever Abdul Fattah found someone he knew and trusted, he presented them with the proposition, and it was usually met with acceptance and agreement. He asked them to form a cell and agreed to contact them soon.

The task of gathering weapons was entrusted to Abdul Fattah, whose business activities served as an excellent cover for this operation. Within a short period, cells began to form, carrying out simple operations like throwing hand grenades at military patrol vehicles, shooting at them, or attempting long-range sniper attacks on such targets. As is usual in resistance work, one of the cells encountered an operational failure, leading to the arrest of its members. Under severe interrogation, some began confessing, leading to more arrests, eventually reaching Abu Ali. He was captured and subjected to intense interrogation in the dungeons of Hebron prison. Abu Ali showed great resilience and refused to confess even the simplest things that some of the young men, deceived during the interrogation, had admitted.

The Israeli intelligence arrested Abdul Fattah after investigating Abu Ali's relationships and friendships. They conducted a thorough search of his house, accompanied by much destruction and damage to everything in their path, including furniture and household items. During this ordeal, my aunt and her young son Abdul Rahim also suffered some abuse. Abdul Fattah was taken to Hebron prison and subjected to severe interrogation and torture, as they questioned him about his relationship with Abu Ali and tried to convince him that Abu Ali had confessed everything. However, Abdul Fattah continued to deny the allegations. Consequently, he was sentenced to six months of administrative detention without any charges, while Abu Ali received a five-year sentence based on the confessions obtained from some of the young men who weren't resilient enough to withstand the interrogation ordeal.

This marked the beginning of my aunt's journey into a new world — the world of prisons. She started visiting her husband once a month. On the day of the visit, she would wake up early, prepare her child, and set off, carrying him in her arms until she reached the village centre.

From there, she would take one of the few cars passing through the village to Hebron. Upon arrival, she would walk a long distance to reach the building (the headquarters of Hebron prison and the military governor's office). There, she would find hundreds of people who had come to visit their sons and relatives in prison. Standing among the women in line, she would hold her identity card, hoping her turn would come in this batch of visitors. Sometimes, the guards would announce that the batch was complete, and she would have to wait for the next one.

Reaching a small opening in the wall, she would hand her ID card to the guard behind the wall for verification and registration. Then she would be allowed into the women's section, where a woman would conduct a provocative search. My aunt would contain her anger, not wanting to lose the opportunity to visit Abdul Rahim, who was undoubtedly eagerly awaiting her and their son, Abdul Rahim. She knew there was no point in getting upset over the demeaning treatment by the contemptible soldier.

After the search, the visitors were gathered in a room and then led through long corridors and dimly lit hallways to the visitation area. There was a wall with window-like openings covered with iron mesh. Behind each window stood a prisoner, and the visitors would search for their relatives among them. When they found them, they would rush to the window, tears in the eyes of a father who could see his child through the bars but couldn’t embrace or play with him. Tears also flowed from the eyes of wives or mothers seeing their husbands or sons behind bars, not knowing what they endured within those merciless walls.

Before the visitors could recover from the fatigue of travel, waiting, and the humiliating search, and before they could fully inquire about the well-being of their husbands, sons, and relatives, the guards would start clapping, shouting that the visit was over. They would begin pulling the prisoners away behind the iron doors. The visitors would be pushed out of the visitation area. My aunt's husband would try to hold back his tears, not wanting the guard to see them and take pleasure in his misery. He would gather his emotions, encouraging his wife that the ordeal would soon be over, just five more months. He would ask her to take care of Abdul Rahim, their home, and to convey his greetings to family and neighbours. She would wipe her tears with the edge of her white embroidered headscarf, assuring him, "Don’t worry, just stay strong. Take care."

In the alleys, neighbourhoods, villages, and camps, new groups and cells were forming across the cities, villages, and ruins of the West Bank. Young men were

heading to the valleys and behind the towering mountains to train with the weapons they had recently acquired or found hidden by their fathers or grandfathers for years. They were ready to start the upcoming confrontation, eagerly awaiting the encounter with the enemy, despite their limited and simple weaponry and their lack of adequate experience. Yet, their youthful spirits were boiling with fervor.

In that shop, where Abdul Fattah, my aunt's husband, and Abu Ali used to meet with a number of traders during the cold days, sipping tea, they discussed the news of the fighting, the imprisonment of Abdul Fattah and Abu Ali, the futility of their actions, and how they wasted a significant period of their lives. One of them calculated the days Abdul Fattah would spend in prison, remarking that he used to earn three Israeli shekels per day in his business, which meant a loss of at least five hundred shekels, not to mention the humiliation and devaluation of himself and his family.

The poor economic situation of most people, which Israel's leaders saw as a potential driver for more people to join the resistance (or "sabotage activities"), along with their need for labor to build the nascent state, led them to consider gradually opening up employment opportunities for the local population, with strict security screening. Indeed, they announced this, and passport and permit offices began to receive applications from men seeking work permits in the territories occupied in 1948. This decision sparked intense debate among various segments of the Palestinian population.

In our neighbourhood square, where men gathered, and despite my grandfather's illness and old age, he still attended these daily meetings where this matter was discussed. People were divided in their opinions. Some were vehemently opposed, asking how we could allow ourselves to build the enemy's state and strengthen its foundations while their soldiers trained and prepared for war against our people and nation. Some viewed working for Israel as a form of betrayal. However, the realists among them recognized that reality had imposed itself, and Israel's existence wouldn't be affected by hundreds or thousands of workers refraining from employment there.

The reality was that there were homes in need of basic necessities like bread and milk for children, which were hard to come by. Therefore, working in Israel, despite its difficulties and bitterness, was seen by some as a national duty to support the resilience of our people in their camps and villages, rather than forcing them to leave due to hardship.

In the shop in Hebron, the acceptance of work in Israel was more commonplace. The people there understood the economic aspects much better, viewing it as a numbers game. Opening up job opportunities for the people was seen as a way to economically flourish the country, which would raise its standard in various fields and strengthen the residents' resolve to stay on their land until Allah decreed a practical change.

However, resistance fighters, especially in refugee camps like the Beach Camp, saw this as a crime. They began collecting information about those who obtained work permits, gathering these permits from workers and destroying them after explaining the dangers and how it contradicted national allegiance. Sometimes, the permit holder would be hit with a cane on the forehead, slapped on the face, or harshly reprimanded.

One of these workers, trying to resist handing over his permit, would point to his eight children behind him, who often went hungry because the aid provided by the UNRWA was insufficient. He would plead with the resistance fighters who wanted to take his permit to consider his situation and allow him to keep it and work. But they would insist on taking the permit, tears in their eyes as they witnessed the vast contradiction between the bitter reality with its needs and requirements and the ceiling of national aspirations. They might discuss this among themselves after tearing up the man's permit, feeling embarrassed and conflicted about the situation.

Chapter Seven

As the weeks leading up to my brother Mahmoud's Tawjihi (high school final) exams approached, a state of emergency was declared in our house. Whenever someone raised their voice, my mother would scold them, demanding silence to provide Mahmoud with a conducive study environment. If one of us ran around or made noise, we would get reprimanded. On those nights, we would huddle around an overturned washing basin to study, and any minor disturbance would result in a slap on the back of the head, a pinch, or a tug of the ear, as maintaining quiet for Mahmoud's study was paramount.

Our exams concluded, but Mahmoud's Tawjihi exams were still about a month away. Despite our exams being over, the state of emergency at home remained until Mahmoud's exams were completed, which we anticipated more than the end of the occupation itself. On the last day of Mahmoud's exams, we welcomed him home with a noisy celebration, expressing all the emotions we had suppressed for nearly two months. The house was filled with noise and laughter as we all jumped on Mahmoud, playfully hitting and teasing him. My mother tried to maintain a stern face, telling us to leave Mahmoud alone, but she couldn't hide her wide smile.

When our results were announced, all of us had passed except for our cousin Hassan, who failed his second year of high school. Another state of emergency was declared on the day of the Tawjihi results. When Mahmoud returned home with a radiant face, bursting with joy, he announced his score: 92%. A tear of relief rolled down my mother's cheek, followed by her jubilant ululation. We again burst into celebration, acknowledging that Mahmoud's success and excellence were a triumph for us all, as each of us had contributed to his journey.

My mother went to the kitchen to prepare a special treat, mixing fenugreek with flour and sugar to make Halwa, a traditional sweet. Mahmoud took it to the neighbourhood oven to bake. When he returned, we didn't wait for my mother to serve it on plates; we all reached in, snatching pieces as she playfully waved her hand, pretending to slap our hands away but never actually doing so. She managed to save some plates for neighbours and relatives who came to congratulate us.

My grandfather's health had severely declined, and it was evident that his time with us was limited. He rarely left his room and could no longer attend the daily meetings in the neighbourhood square. Hassan's failure in school seemed to have added to his worries, and he no longer participated in our family events. Nevertheless, we all gathered around him, trying to cheer him up.

Mahmoud had to wait for the summer break and a whole year after completing his high school to join a university in Egypt. It was an ideal opportunity for him to earn some money for his upcoming expenses. The idea of working inside the 1948-occupied territories was completely rejected, so he had to continue working in my uncle's factory and look for additional jobs to save enough for his studies.

After much thought, Mahmoud and my mother decided that he would stop working at my uncle's factory. Instead, my brothers Hassan and Mohammed would work there, allowing Mahmoud to focus on a more lucrative and serious job.

Mahmoud's new business idea didn't require significant capital. He decided to set up a vegetable stall at the edge of the local vegetable market. This small venture required only a few shekels to start and promised modest earnings. However, saving consistently over the year could accumulate a reasonable sum for his future studies.

Indeed, my mother would wake Mahmoud up early every morning just as dawn broke and the curfew was lifted. He would head to the city's wholesale market with three or four shekels to buy whatever vegetables were available. He would then return to his stall, arrange the vegetables, and begin selling them. By noon, he would gather any unsold vegetables to bring home for our mother to use. Every day, they would save a portion of the day's earnings—twenty piastres or a quarter of a shekel—as savings.

The daytime curfews recurred periodically. However, since the neighbours needed the vegetables Mahmoud bought, his business did not suffer during these curfews. His stall would move to our house, and in the narrow alleys of the neighbourhood, he could deliver produce to the neighbours without fear of the occupation soldiers. The soldiers were hesitant to enter the camp, fearing ambushes set up by the resistance fighters and guerrillas.

As the resistance and guerrilla activities continued to grow, the military commanders realized the challenges posed by the crowded camps and narrow

alleys. They contemplated carving broad streets through the camps to divide them into manageable quarters for easier control and sweeping.

One day, a curfew was imposed on the camp, and a large force of soldiers arrived, almost as if it were a new occupation. Some soldiers carried buckets of red paint and brushes. On some house walls, they marked large red X's; on others, they drew vertical lines after taking measurements, followed by small X's. Notifications were handed to the owners of these marked houses, stating that the houses with large X's would be demolished entirely. The sections indicated by the small X's in houses with vertical lines would be partially demolished. With each notification delivered, there were cries, curses, and wailing as people wondered where they would go with their children, wives, and husbands, facing the prospect of being on the streets again.

Fortunately for us, none of the streets planned for construction affected our house, as no marks were made on it. It became apparent that our house would now face a wide street instead of the narrow alley, unlike our neighbour's house, which was set for complete demolition.

It indeed seemed to be a stroke of luck for my brother Mahmoud. Had our house or a portion of it been demolished, the money Mahmoud had saved for his studies in Egypt wouldn't have been enough to repair our home, and he wouldn't have been able to leave the sector and leave us on the street. But, as my mother often said, Allah favored him and her, the downtrodden one.

Days later, bulldozers accompanied by a large military force arrived and announced the mandatory evacuation of the houses marked for demolition. The bulldozers began to demolish the houses ruthlessly, crushing them like a monster grinding the bones of its prey, breaking the hearts of hundreds of men, women, and children who found themselves in the streets once again.

The bulldozers continued their relentless work in the camp, and with each pass, another man would collapse, a woman would fall after pulling her hair and slapping her cheeks in despair, or a man would be beaten brutally by soldiers for trying to block the bulldozer from demolishing the roof sheltering his children. By evening, hundreds of tragedies had unfolded, and people were left to tend to each other's wounds. My uncle's house, being empty since his wife's marriage, was temporarily offered by my mother to two neighbouring families to stay in until they figured out their next steps. We were showered with words of gratitude and praise for our help.

The following day, representatives from the Red Cross arrived to assess the situation and gather data. The next day, housing officials from the UNRWA came to collect information and informed the people that they would be rehoused in new buildings constructed by the agency in different areas. This news was received as a great relief, a blessing from heaven.

People bombarded the officials with questions about when and where they would be rehoused and the specifics of the process. While the officials didn't have clear answers, it didn't take long before families began moving into their new homes built in the same sector or in the city of El-Arish, as Israel had occupied the entire Sinai in 1967. The two families staying in my uncle's house left during this period, each receiving a new home.

The opening of work opportunities in the territories occupied in 1948 caused significant turmoil among the people. However, the dire need of many to provide for their children and maintain their dignity in decent homes with doors that close and walls that shield their privacy compelled them to seek work in the occupied territories.

The necessity for education, medicine, and coping with the high cost of living proved to be stronger than any opposition to working in Israel. This led to a gradual acceptance and normalization of such work. The stream of life revived the desire to continue living and to improve life standards. Parents were focused on ensuring a better life and future for their children, and this need gradually made working in Israel a common practice, beyond the control of the resistance fighters to prevent or stop.

After the streets were expanded and job opportunities in Israel opened up, coupled with the fierce war waged by the Israeli intelligence and army against the resistance, there was a noticeable sense of relief. Curfews were lifted more frequently in the mornings to allow workers to leave early for their jobs in places like Haifa and Jaffa, traveling hours from the West Bank and Gaza. It became evident that the living standards of families whose heads worked in Israel were gradually improving. Within a short period, one could see noticeable changes in the neighbourhood – people raising the roofs of their houses from tiles to zinc sheets, enhancing the walls, installing sturdy doors, and buying cement and coarse sand from the beach mixed with shells to pave their house floors.

Our house, despite being one of the best in the neighbourhood before the war, began to look modest compared to the improved houses of our neighbours.

Some neighbours, unable to afford significant changes, resorted to using large pieces of nylon to cover their tile roofs. They would secure the nylon with wooden strips nailed down, preventing it from sliding off. This project, although not costly, offered a reasonable solution to the problem of rainwater leaking into the rooms.

After discussing with Mahmoud, my mother decided to add nylon to our house's roof. Mahmoud purchased the necessary materials and borrowed tools from a neighbour. My brothers Hassan and Mohammed helped him with the installation. This improvement was a remarkable development in our lives during the winter, as we could now sleep comfortably without the worry of water leaks, the sound of droplets, or the spray splashing on our faces and beds.

As a third-grade student, our school had a routine visit from the agency's doctor who would check the health conditions of the students. If he found any student showing clear signs of malnutrition or poor physical development, he would note their names. These students would later receive cards allowing them to eat once at the health centre's nutrition centre, run by the UNRWA in the camp. During one of these visits, the doctor noted my name, and I knew I would be receiving a nutrition card. When I received it, I was overjoyed.

I took the card home and excitedly told my siblings. Fatima, however, was extremely upset and tried to snatch the card from me, insisting that we weren't poor. I called out to my mother, who reassured Fatima that there was no shame in receiving the nutrition card. We were refugees, and it was natural for one of the children to get the card. We were already dependent on the agency for housing, schooling, and healthcare. When our houses were demolished, it was the agency that provided us with new homes. Reluctantly, Fatima let go of the card, still unconvinced.

Every day, during or after school hours, hundreds of boys and girls would go to the nutrition centre. We would stand in a long line, enter one by one after much jostling and quarreling, and then be silent because the director of the centre would sit behind a desk. He would take the card from each of us, cross out the number and date, hand back the card, and give us a small loaf of bread. Another worker would then give us a tray with several compartments, each containing a different type of food, including fruits or pudding.

We would take our trays to the dining hall, sit at tables with chairs, and devour the delicious food. After eating, we would throw the trays through the kitchen

window for washing and exit through a designated door. At this exit, a staff member would search us to ensure we hadn't taken any food out, as it was meant to be consumed inside for health reasons. Those caught trying to sneak food out would have it confiscated and thrown away as a lesson to eat their food inside.

Ibrahim, my best friend, and I were always together. One Tuesday, which was kofta day, Ibrahim came with me to the nutrition centre. We had agreed that I would sneak half of my bread stuffed with kofta for him in a small nylon bag I had brought.

I sat at the table, Ibrahim expectantly waiting for me at the exit. With deft and cautious movements, I stuffed half my bread with a portion of my kofta, tucking it into a nylon bag, then stealthily sliding it into my pants. After consuming the rest of my meal, I stood up, carefully adjusting my trousers to avoid any suspicion during the inspection. I tossed my plate through the kitchen window and approached the door, where Mrs. Aisha stood for the inspection. Raising my arms above my head, I played the role of an obedient boy as she conducted a swift search. Cleared, I stepped outside, scanning for Ibrahim while reaching into my trousers to retrieve the half loaf.

Just as I got hold of it, I saw them – about thirty boys from a troublesome family living near the health centre, whom we dubbed "the Heksos." They charged towards me, intent on snatching the sandwich from my grasp. Without a second thought, I bolted, pumping my legs as fast as they could carry me. After a considerable distance, I glanced back to ensure they had given up the chase. But in that brief moment of distraction, a large stone hurled from one of them struck me directly in the eye. The world went dark before me, the bread slipping from my grasp and hitting the dirt-covered ground. Clutching my ration card, I continued to sprint, shouting for my mother, until I reached our home. My mother, gripped by panic, lifted my hand from my eye to assess the damage, then cried out in despair, "Oh no, his eye is gone!"

She grabbed her headscarf, alternately carrying and dragging me by the hand as we raced to the UNRWA clinic. Upon arrival, we headed straight to the ophthalmology room, staffed by a specialist nurse. However, my mother's frantic state had caused her to forget the essential nutrition card, a prerequisite for any treatment at the clinic. Despite her pleas and desperate attempts to explain the situation, the staff remained adamant: no card, no treatment. I sat, resigned, on a wooden bench outside the eye clinic as my mother rushed back home to fetch the forgotten card, hoping to return before the clinic's closing time. After the

nurse was convinced that my mother had indeed gone to fetch the nutrition card, he called me over and sat me down on the chair. He began examining my eye and applied a thick gauze patch over it, securing it in place. I waited there, anticipating my mother's return. She came back, breathless from the hurried journey, having run a considerable distance. The registration procedures were completed, and my mother was reassured by the nurse that my eye was fine. She tenderly held my hand, and we slowly made our way back home.

At that time, my main concern wasn't the injury to my eye, but rather that my sister Fatima had taken advantage of the situation and torn up my food card. It felt as though she had blinded my other eye by depriving me of the meals at the canteen.

Our family's financial situation was average during this period. Some families had progressed beyond us, thanks to their breadwinners working inside the occupied territories, while others, like the family of our neighbour Um al-Abd, were much worse off. Um al-Abd was a widow with four sons and three daughters, left to fend for themselves after her husband was martyred in 1967. She often said her husband left them "as mere scraps of flesh."

Though the UNRWA provided for most aspects of life, there were corners that needed financial coverage beyond what the agency could provide. Um al-Abd sought out every possible means of honest earnings. Her children would venture out every Friday with burlap bags, heading towards an area near the 1948 borders, where they would collect old shoes, expired canned goods, and empty beer bottles from a nearby Jewish settlement's dump. They brought back whatever they could sell or use, loading up their bags for the return trip.

Um al-Abd would wash the bottles thoroughly and sell them to another woman who peddled them near the clinic. People bought these bottles to store medicine dispensed by the clinic. She cleaned the shoes, paired them, and sold them to a vendor in the market, who then sold them to the camp residents. She also visited the canteen every morning to buy surplus milk allocations from other women, turning it into jameed (a semi-solid form of yogurt) and selling it at the school gate. Since the children often didn't have money, she traded the jameed for pieces of bread, using some for her family and selling the rest to scrape together enough money to meet her children's needs. She was a woman content with her lot, raising her martyr's children with immense dedication and pride.

My brother Mahmoud was accepted into the Engineering Faculty at Cairo University. The day we learned this, we celebrated in our usual way – with loud cheers, playful attacks on Mahmoud, pinching and hitting him. My mother prepared a tray of Halabia, a traditional sweet, and we were showered with blessings and congratulations. Mahmoud then began preparing for his journey. The vegetable stall had to continue operating as it would cover his educational expenses for the upcoming years. Hence, Hassan had to manage it in a way that fit with his school schedule and commitments. Mahmoud diligently worked at the stall until the day before his departure to Egypt, and I was to take over his cleaning and organizing responsibilities at our uncle's factory, along with my brother Mohammed.

Before Mahmoud's departure to Egypt, my mother prepared many items for him to take along, including olive oil, tea, dried molokhia, dried okra, and other similar items. They bought Egyptian pounds from the currency market with the savings they had accumulated. Mahmoud took these to a tailor, who sewed them into a belt inside his trousers. This was to ensure he could take the money to Egypt, as the Jewish customs officers often confiscated funds and prohibited travelers from carrying money to Egypt.

Mahmoud visited the Red Cross office, which coordinated the travel of students from the Gaza Strip to Egypt and back, between the Israeli authorities and the Egyptian government. He finally learned his departure date. Like other students, he had to visit the intelligence department at the Saraya, where they were interrogated, warned against working with any organization, and attempts were made to recruit some of them.

On the last night before Mahmoud's departure, we stayed up later than usual. He was going to leave us for about a year. The night was a strange mix of laughter, tears, joy, and sadness, especially filled with my mother's instructions and commands to Mahmoud.

We woke up early the next morning. My mother had packed two large, used suitcases that Mahmoud had bought, filling them with all his necessities. My brother Hassan carried one, and our cousin Hassan the other, as they left with my mother to bid Mahmoud farewell. We said our goodbyes at the edge of our neighbourhood and returned home, feeling a deep sense of sadness. We were beginning to understand the true meaning of parting from loved ones.

They escorted him to the Red Cross headquarters where many people had gathered to bid farewell to their children. The students waited inside the buses while their families stood at a distance, waving goodbye. As the buses departed, the families continued to wave until the vehicles disappeared from sight.

Days after Mahmoud's departure, one of our neighbours complained that my cousin Hassan was bothering and harassing one of her daughters. My mother's face turned red with embarrassment, and she promised to address the issue. With my grandfather bedridden and Mahmoud in Egypt, everyone left in the house was younger than Hassan, who had grown up and become difficult to manage. Thus, my mother thought to use cunning and persuasion.

In the late afternoon, she called him over and began to speak to him, reminding him of the importance of being a good neighbour, his father's legacy as a martyr, our family's reputation, and what people would say. Eventually, Hassan promised not to approach the neighbour's daughter again. My mother asked, "A promise of honor, Hassan?" He replied, "A promise of honor, auntie."

Days later, the neighbour returned, trembling, and burst into the house, exclaiming, "Oh, Mahmoud's mother, this boy is no saint; he cornered my daughter in the street and laid his hands on her." My mother was furious and tried to calm her down, saying, "You know neither you nor I have any men to discipline him, but God knows your daughters are like my own. Let's think of how to put an end to this boy's behavior." They sat down to discuss. My mother proposed that they would tie him up while he slept and beat him with her and the boys' help. If he repeated his behavior, she would seek help from one of the resistance fighters, consequences be damned.

My mother prepared a rope and a stick, and when Hassan returned home, ate dinner, and went to bed, she, along with my brothers Hassan and Muhammad, entered his room. After making sure he was asleep, she gently and carefully tied his legs and hands with the rope. Then she woke my grandfather to inform him of Hassan's behavior. Shaking with anger, my grandfather said, "May God blacken your face, Hassan...blacken your face," and instructed them to beat him, even break his arms and legs. When Hassan woke up and found himself bound, he started threatening and cursing as the stick began to fall on his sides. After a severe beating, my mother made it clear they had kept the matter within the house to avoid public shame, but if he harassed Sa'ad again, she would inform the resistance fighters and ask them to break his arms and legs. They left him tied until the morning, when she asked my cousin Ibrahim to untie him.

Ibrahim was kind, obedient, intelligent, and diligent in his studies. He went and unbound his brother, but Hassan hit him while making threats. Then, Hassan rushed into our room, threatening and attempting to intimidate my mother, who yelled at him, "Wake up! Do you think you can scare me? You are a neglectful person, and the neglectful cannot scare anyone. You'll never become a man or a real man."

Hassan roared, moved towards my mother, and pushed her, causing her to fall. We all, boys and girls alike, attacked him, knocking him to the ground, hitting, biting, and pulling his hair. He got up, kicking, hitting, cursing, and left the house. Hassan left and did not return. We heard he had gone to the territories occupied in 1948 (inside Israel) and was working there, deciding not to return to his studies.

My grandfather's health deteriorated, and he passed away, leaving us in tears and sorrow—may God have mercy on him and grant him paradise. My grandfather died without knowing anything about the fate of my father, who had been missing for over five years, without seeing his grandson who fled Gaza to work in Israel, and without Mahmoud by his side. However, we did our duty, and the neighbours stood by us, as the camp is like one big family in joy and sorrow.

Chapter Eight

Every morning, hundreds of children from the camp, ranging from seven-year-olds attending first grade to eighteen-year-olds in high school, would head out to their schools around seven o'clock. Groups of boys would follow groups of girls, and so on, each morning. The majority of the camp's youth didn't engage in romantic relationships, adhering to the unwritten rule of treating neighbour's daughters like sisters.

My mother always cautioned my siblings and me against relationships with the opposite sex. She frequently warned my brothers not to look at or interact with neighbour's daughters and cautioned all of us against disrespecting others' honor, reminding us that disrespect could be returned, no matter how clever one might think they are. This deterred us from even thinking about engaging in the behaviors some boys and young men did, such as standing on the corner of the street watching girls go to and from school.

Some of these young men stood by just to watch the girls or to throw fleeting comments like, "Where are you going, beautiful?" or "Don't ignore us... pride belongs to God." Others stood to catch a glimpse of the girls they loved, hoping for a relationship to develop, a look of acknowledgment that could fill their day with joy, or the chance to pass a heartfelt written message. Despite their hardships, camp residents, like everyone else, experienced love and lived life fully, though traditionally and with a high level of respect for customs, making expressions of love and affection more restrained and respectful, often confined to longing glances, distant admiration, or especially helpful deeds that might prompt others to wonder about the motives behind such dedication.

"However, some of the youth in the camp were braver in crossing those boundaries, allowing themselves to write and exchange love letters, and to meet during the goings and comings from school, even if it meant walking one behind the other as if by coincidence. Sometimes, they would exchange a few words as though each was speaking with his or her friends. Some girls even allowed themselves to open the window of their room at a specific hour when their beloved would pass by at that very moment to throw his letter through it. Often, many of the girls were beaten by their fathers, brothers, or mothers when they

were caught exchanging letters with young men. Yet, all these stories were very few and rare in the camp during that early period after the war.

On the other hand, the number of workers heading in the morning to work inside the territories occupied in 1948 gradually increased, and the phenomenon grew along with other accompanying phenomena. In the early hours of the morning, men would leave, each carrying a small bag or a backpack with his day's food, walking a long distance to the workers' stop. There, a large number of cars, trucks, and buses would be present, some heading to Jaffa, others to Ashdod, Tel Aviv, and beyond, with each driver calling out to passengers for his destination. The workers would gather, boarding the vehicles that took off with them. Many street vendors selling falafel, beans, or salep found in this large gathering of workers a suitable target and a profitable market for their business. As the workers made their way to the vehicle that would transport them, each would pull a few coins from his pocket to buy some falafel balls, quickly eat them to put in his food bag, and then rush to the vehicle that would carry them, throwing themselves into it to resume the sleep they had cut short by an hour or two until reaching their workplace, there in the heart of the occupied homeland.

These workers were employed in construction, agriculture, or cleaning, in any of the difficult and professional fields of work disdained by the Jews. The Jewish employer (boss) would stand over them issuing orders and monitoring their work. At ten o'clock in the morning, they would take a half-hour break to eat their breakfast or lunch and drink tea if they were able to prepare it. Then they would get up to continue their day's work. By three or four in the afternoon, they would finish their work, look for a car to take them back to Gaza or the West Bank, sleep on the return journey, and return to their homes exhausted from the labor."

On Fridays, they work only until 2 p.m., as Jewish employers prepare for the Sabbath, which is a weekly holiday. Some of these workers work on a daily basis, receiving their wages at the end of the workday, and then head out again the next day, standing at the workers' stops where contractors and Jewish employers in their short pants come in their cars looking for laborers, prompting the workers to flock to them. The employers select those who fit their needs and agree on a wage. Others work more consistently on a weekly, monthly, or permanent basis.

As relationships between Arab workers and Jewish employers evolved and in the face of exhaustion from daily travel, employers began looking for places for their workers to stay throughout the week. Workers leave their homes early on Sunday morning and stay at their jobs until Friday noon, returning to their families with

their pockets filled with money and their bags or baskets with items brought from Israel.

Some workers rent houses in Qalqilya or Tulkarm to be closer to the inside, sharing a room or house where they live throughout the week, and sometimes even for the month, to save on transportation costs and spare the effort and fatigue of daily commuting. There, within the occupied land, Palestinian workers encounter a new world with completely different customs, norms, and values from those of our people. The vast majority of these workers remain unaffected, looking upon it with disdain and contempt, but some young men get influenced, starting to drink alcohol, frequent brothels, nightclubs, and dance halls. In rare cases, one might meet a Jewish girl, develop a relationship with her, and start living with her according to the values and customs of her society.

With the influx of worker movement, the need for more vehicles to transport these workers increased, opening opportunities for a new set of drivers. Some of these workers managed to buy a car to travel to work, taking a specific number of workers from their neighbours who pay the usual fare, saving them the morning walk to the workers' stop and the evening return home. Thus, Peugeot cars started entering the areas, increasing the presence and movement of vehicles. One of these workers might bring back chairs, seats, or other types of furniture on the back of his car, which his Jewish employer (master) wanted to dispose of after buying new replacements, using them to improve the living standards in his home, gift to friends or relatives, or to sell in the market (the flea market).

Jewish merchants began flocking to the city of Hebron and other nearby towns, especially Tulkarm and Qalqilya, to purchase their supplies. Some of them contracted with blacksmith or carpentry workshops, or the like, to supply them with a hundred doors or a thousand windows or similar, finding their needs at much lower prices than in Israeli factories. Palestinian employers raised their prices, thus earning more and employing other local workers. Despite the general improvement in people's financial situation, resistance continued in waves of fluctuation, never solely linked to the material situation but also to national belonging and a sense of duty. The financial difficulties fueled these feelings, hence the continuation of guerrilla operations: bombings here, shootings there, curfews imposed, arrests and investigations conducted, passersby detained for hours, spies discovered and killed.

The influx of hundreds and thousands of workers into the Jewish state opened opportunities for militants to consider executing widespread operations within the

territories occupied since 1948, targeting population centres in cities, towns, villages, and settlements, thus opening a new front in the resistance. Abd al-Hafiz, the son of our neighbour Umm al-Abd, convinced his mother that for the future of all his siblings, he should stop his studies and work to enable his brothers and sisters to live and complete their education, relieving her from the exhausting tasks that wore her down. After repeated attempts to convince her, she agreed to the idea.

Abd al-Hafiz, like thousands of others, went to work inside Israel every morning and returned in the evening. After months, they managed to install a decent door for their house, replaced the tiles with corrugated iron sheets (zinc), and paved the house's floor with cement. However, after a while, everyone discovered that Abd al-Hafiz had another goal for working in Israel beyond improving living standards and educating his siblings. About two years later, it was discovered that he had joined the ranks of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, aiming to prepare and plan for guerrilla operations inside the territories occupied since 1948. Indeed, months after he started his job and became accustomed to the new reality, he occasionally took a bomb, hid it in his food bag, and carried it to Jaffa. There, he chose a bus, café, or nightclub to place and hide it before returning home after work, where it would then explode, causing injuries, damages, or sometimes fatalities. Abd al-Hafiz remained in this state for two years, working with utmost caution and carefulness. He succeeded in executing many operations. The investigations conducted by the intelligence agency (Shin Bet at the time) led to significant suspicion towards Abd al-Hafiz. One night, a large force from the occupation army raided the neighbourhood, surrounded the house, and arrested him for interrogation. There, he was subjected to hanging, beating, and torture, all the while denying any involvement in the accusations against him. Eventually, they arrested a colleague of his who confessed that Abd al-Hafiz was an organizer in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Faced with this, he confessed only to that fact and was sentenced to a year and a half in prison.

As the academic year ended and the summer vacation approached, signaling the return of my brother Mahmoud from Egypt, we would start visiting the Red Cross headquarters to inquire about the return schedule of university students from Egypt, or to check the announcement board there where the names and return dates of the returning groups were posted. On the day Mahmoud was to return, we all would go out to wait for him at the passport building, where buses carrying students accompanied by military jeeps arrived. They would enter the passport

area, disembark, and wait in the waiting hall where their families would rush to them, embracing, kissing, and greeting them before heading home.

Every year, we sat there waiting for Mahmoud's return. When he came out to us, we would rush towards him; he would embrace and kiss us, ask about our well-being, and kiss our mother's head and hand. She would look at him with pride and tears of joy in her eyes, overjoyed by her son, the esteemed engineer Mahmoud. Despite our limited means, our mother would make an effort to prepare various types of food to honor Mahmoud's return and compensate for a year of absence.

Mahmoud would bring us some cotton clothes from Egyptian manufactures. In those days, we began to know the texture and smell of new clothes, having worn only what we received from the agency or bought second-hand before. Since the end of his first year of study, our mother started calling him "the esteemed engineer."

On a street corner, a group of young men spread a black blanket, received from the agency, and sat on it to play cards (Shedeh) every day after the afternoon. They sat there spending some of their time in the absence of other entertainment means, continuing their game until after the evening prayer when darkness fell. They would then gather their cards, shake off their blanket, fold it, and return to their homes, as curfew time was approaching.

One day, Sheikh Ahmad passed by them; that's what they called him, although he was still young, returning from the evening prayer at the mosque. He greeted them as usual whenever he passed by them, but this time, he approached them, sat with them, and they clearly expressed their surprise by stopping their play, gathering the cards, and paying full attention to the arrival of this unexpected visitor. Sheikh Ahmad sat with them and said, "Allow me to speak to you about an important matter concerning you." Their faces showed surprise, and they said, "Please, go ahead." The Sheikh started speaking at length, quoting verses from the Holy Quran and Hadiths, warning against wasting time in unbeneficial entertainment, urging obedience, worship of Allah, and performing the obligatory duties, reminding them of Allah's blessings, warning of the loss in the hereafter and the punishment of hell. He gently linked all this to the future of Islam, which must raise its flag in the land of Palestine, the land of Isra and Mi'raj, until the land is liberated, and the people are freed, and the efforts succeed.

The four young men remained silent, astonished by the speech they heard for the first time, appreciating the strange connection between religion and nationalism, a mixture they had never heard before. The Palestinian scene had recently accustomed to seeing either the Sheikh or the religious person disconnected from reality and the national concern or the nationalist or guerrilla who has no relation to religion or religiosity. They started to show signs of admiration, satisfaction, and conviction with the words of the young Sheikh.

One of them asked, "And what is required of us, Sheikh?" A slight smile appeared on Sheikh Ahmad's lips, saying, "Tomorrow, God willing, you will bathe, purify yourselves, perform ablution, then go to the mosque for prayer, whenever the call to prayer is raised." The young men nodded their heads, indicating their agreement. Sheikh Ahmad greeted each of them one by one, pressing his hand on each, and then left. They gathered their cards, shook and folded their blanket, and left as darkness fell and curfew time had arrived.

After the campaign to carve out streets, it became clear that the occupation army's ability to control the camp had become much easier. The patrols, being vehicle-borne, could move around easily and monitor activities within the camp, thereby easily besieging any quarter where hostile movements were suspected, searching it, and arresting or killing those they suspected. The speed and mobility of the patrol cars, enabling them to reach all corners of the camp unexpectedly, began to weigh heavily on the resistance and the guerrillas. It became necessary to develop a new method for quickly alerting the guerrillas about the nearby presence of occupation forces, allowing them to take caution and prepare. Whenever occupation soldiers appeared anywhere, and as soon as any of the boys, girls, and even adults, men, and women saw the occupation forces, they shouted loudly "Bai'oo" (Sell), and everyone who heard this word immediately repeated it loudly ("Bai'oo.. Bai'oo.. Bai'oo and be relieved from it"). The intention was to demand the occupation soldiers to sell their weapons.

This phenomenon of calling out and raising the voice with this call quickly turned into a form of folk anthem. When students on their way to and from school saw an occupation patrol, their throats opened up in a rampant folk song ("Bai'oo.. Bai'oo.. Bai'oo and be relieved from it, and sandals are better than it"), and they kept repeating this as long as their eyes were fixed on that patrol, leaving the soldiers unsure how to react, thus falling into confusion and perplexity.

The guerrillas heard these voices and knew their location, taking their precautions and preparing accordingly. Usually, it was the children who chanted this call, but

when no children were present and the adults had no choice but to chant it to alert the guerrillas, they did not hesitate to raise their voices with it. Days passed quickly, and we started counting the days for Mahmoud's return from Egypt, having graduated from the College of Engineering. We frequented the Red Cross headquarters daily, looking for his name among the batches returning from Egypt and his return date. After days of visiting the headquarters and inquiring, the lists of returnees were posted on the announcement board, and we found Mahmoud's name in the third batch. We flew home to inform our mother of the arrival date of the esteemed engineer Mahmoud.

The preparation and readiness to welcome him were in full swing. The most significant thing was that she asked my brother Hassan to buy a quantity of lime (plaster), for which we prepared a pit in the middle of the courtyard, placed it there, and poured water over it to cool it down. Then we started to filter it and whitewashed the entire courtyard with white and a touch of blue. Then my mother began preparing food and drinks, especially fenugreek and sweet basbousa for us and the loved ones who would come to share in our joy and blessings.

On the day Mahmoud was due to arrive, we got ready and went out to welcome him opposite the General Directorate of Passports. The buses, watched over by army vehicles, entered the premises. We waited eagerly, along with hundreds of other families. The returnees began to emerge one by one until Mahmoud appeared. We ran towards him, our mother leading us, and he welcomed us with all his love, tears streaming from his eyes. When we reached our mother, who shed tears of immense joy, Mahmoud bent down to kiss her head and hands, and she blessed his graduation. He murmured, "I have returned, mother, and the era of hardship and toil has ended, God willing, never to return." "Thank God, thank God, God willing, God willing," she repeated. As soon as we reached the house, nearly the entire neighbourhood gathered to welcome Mahmoud in a celebration resembling a massive public event. All the men hugged and kissed him, the women congratulated my mother, some even ululated. We entered the house with difficulty due to the crowded street despite its width, as neighbours pushed into the courtyard to offer their blessings and congratulations. My mother and my siblings were busy offering sweets and drinks to them, and calls of "Ya" engineer echoed as neighbours called Mahmoud, asking him about Egypt, the university, his health, and everything.

As the sun neared setting and darkness began to envelope, the curfew approached, so the neighbours started to leave their homes, repeating words of congratulations and blessings. We, the family, sat in the house around Mahmoud alone, including Uncle Ibrahim's household, which had become part of our family without any distinction. The discussions about hopes and aspirations began. Hassan would clear the stall and dedicate himself only to studying. Muhammad and I would stop our modest work at our uncle's factory. We planned to build a new room in the house, raise the roof over two rooms, elevate their walls, roof them with asbestos, raise their floor, and pave the courtyard's floor with cement, etc. These projects were only to commence once Mahmoud got a job and started receiving his salary.

It was clear that Mahmoud had no intention of leaving the camp or the sector to work abroad. He was pleased to return home after completing his studies away from his family. We spent two more days celebrating Mahmoud's return and graduation, welcoming well-wishers. However, on the third night, hours into the curfew, while we were trying to sleep, we heard the sounds of patrol cars, which then drove away. Unexpectedly, we heard soldiers in our courtyard and their loud knocks on the door, calling us out. My mother and sisters quickly covered their heads, and we followed Mahmoud out to the courtyard, where we found dozens of soldiers occupying our home, with their rifles pointed at us from every direction.

My mother, emerging from the room, yelled, "What do you want? What are you after? What do you need?" The officer, addressing Mahmoud, asked, "Are you Mahmoud?" Mahmoud affirmed, and the officer said they needed him briefly at the headquarters. My mother protested, noting he had just returned from Egypt, but the officer insisted they only needed to ask him a few questions and promised he would return by morning. Mahmoud was asked to accompany them immediately, without changing his clothes. My mother attempted to follow, but they stopped her and closed the door behind them, as the vehicles sped away from our home and neighbourhood.

That night, we couldn't find peace or sleep, as my mother screamed, cried, and lamented her luck, saying, "The poor woman wanted to celebrate, but found no place for her joy." Fatima and Hassan tried to calm her, reassuring her that Mahmoud would return by morning, as the officer had said it was only for a few questions. She repeated, "Just a few questions? If it was just a few questions, they could have waited for daylight and summoned him formally." She then returned

to lamenting, "Oh, my misfortune, oh my misfortune, what have you done, my son Mahmoud? What have you done?"

As dawn broke and the curfew lifted, dressed and accompanied by my brother Hassan, she headed to the headquarters. The soldiers guarding the gate stopped her, preventing her from entering while she tried to explain what happened and her desire to see what happened with Mahmoud. They didn't understand what she was saying and only repeated, "Go away from here."

Faced with the uncomfortable situation, Hassan convinced her that they wouldn't allow her entry and that they should wait across the street until Mahmoud's release. He gently pulled her across and made her sit, waiting as hours passed with no sign of Mahmoud. She alternated between wanting to leave and attempting to enter, while Hassan dissuaded her, warning it would only cause trouble. Back at home, we declared a state of mourning, anxiously awaiting the return of our mother, Hassan, and Mahmoud, but the wait prolonged.

As the evening approached, our mother and Hassan returned, their slow steps and sorrowful faces indicating the grim news without needing to utter a word. We didn't dare to speak, each retreating into silence. Hassan sat beside our distraught mother, promising to seek a lawyer the next day to inquire about Mahmoud and to notify the Red Cross of his arrest, to which she agreed.

Early the next morning, they set out to fulfill this task, hiring a lawyer and informing the Red Cross, only to learn that nothing could be done but wait, possibly without any news for a month. The first few days were dark and heavy, yet we learned to adapt to misfortune, accepting that all our prior plans were either cancelled or indefinitely postponed. Hassan had to continue working at the stall, and I, along with Muhammad, kept our jobs at our uncle's factory for cleaning and organizing.

Every few days, my mother and Hassan would visit the lawyer and the Red Cross, checking for updates. After more than a month, the lawyer informed us that Mahmoud would be charged and presented in court, suggesting the matter seemed minor and resolution could be expected within two or three weeks. About two weeks later, we learned that Mahmoud had been taken to court and the judge had extended his detention by another two months. Another two weeks passed before we were informed by the Red Cross that Mahmoud could receive

visitors in Gaza Central Prison, allowing us a visit on the first Friday of each month, starting the following month.

Hassan, having completed high school and facing our family's economic constraints that precluded studying abroad, chose to enroll in the industrial school run by UNRWA, accepted into the machining and fitting department. He was to start his two-year diploma course at the beginning of the year, hopeful despite the challenges our family faced.

Chapter Nine

In Jordan, after the victory at Karameh, King Hussein famously declared, "We are all guerrillas," inspiring thousands of Palestinian youth from refugee camps across Arab countries to join Fatah, fueled by the dignity associated with the victory at Karameh. The Palestinian revolution began to firmly establish itself on the ground in Jordan and other Arab states, with its leaders, especially Yasser Arafat, being warmly welcomed in Arab capitals, notably in Cairo by Jamal Abdel Nasser, who was considered the leader of the Arab nation.

Many Palestinian families were divided between the West Bank and refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, or Syria, not just those who migrated in 1948 but also many families that were dispersed during the 1967 war, fleeing the Israeli occupation and fearing brutal massacres.

One such family was the family of the merchant Ahmad from Hebron, who often hosted my aunt's husband, Abdul Fattah, for conversations. They shared a good business relationship. Abu Ahmad had four sons; one stayed with him in Hebron, while the other three fled to Jordan during the 1967 occupation. Two of them joined the revolution in Jordan, and the third worked as a truck driver there. The ones involved in the revolution could never return to Hebron for fear of arrest by the occupying authorities, while the third, Ahmad, occasionally visited his family and sometimes sat with his father in his shop, where he would meet my aunt's husband and discuss the situation of Palestinians in Jordan.

The Palestinian situation in Jordan was undoubtedly a source of pride and dignity for all Palestinians, but Ahmad was concerned about the future. He believed that the growing Palestinian power in Jordan was starting to worry King Hussein. More alarmingly, some guerrillas there were acting without regard for people's feelings, possibly exaggerating in challenging those sentiments, which could justify conflicts between the revolution and the king. Ahmad expressed these fears more than once, but some attendees tried to reassure themselves that matters could never escalate to clashes and conflict, considering such an outcome impossible.

Suddenly, the news of the confrontations that came to be known as Black September in 1970 began to spread, evolving into real battles that resonated throughout the region and led to political movements at the level of Arab leaderships. Um Ahmad had three sons in Jordan amidst those fierce clashes,

each with a wife and children, placing them in real danger. Um Ahmad found herself unable to sleep or eat, trembling with fear for them. Abu Ahmad tried to calm and reassure her, advising her to trust in God, for nothing would happen except what God had decreed. Yet, a mother's heart knows no peace in such situations.

Given the circumstances, Abu Ahmad decided to travel to Jordan to check on his sons and their families. Um Ahmad exclaimed, "Are you going alone?" He replied, "Yes," to which she questioned the purpose, expressing that her worry and concern would only increase. He asked, "What's the solution? What do you suggest?" She insisted they travel together. Despite his attempts to dissuade her, he could not. He arranged the permits for both of them, and they set off to Jordan, where the situation resembled a real war.

Reaching their son Saeed's house, the driver, was fraught with grave dangers. Once they arrived, they could not rest easy as the situation was extremely perilous, with gunfire never ceasing. They had to close the windows and barricade them with cabinets and house furniture to prevent bullets from entering and injuring anyone inside. They had to walk bent over all the time; if anyone dared to walk upright, everyone else would scream at them not to raise their head lest they be hit by a stray bullet. Abu Ahmad would mutter every so often, "This is from under your head; we were safe back there," to which Um Ahmad would reply that being there with their children and grandchildren, despite the danger, was a thousand times better than waiting back home in agony. He would then mutter, "Okay, okay, may God make things right... Oh Protector, Oh Protector."

The events of Black September ended, and the revolution moved to Lebanon. As things began to calm down, Abu Ahmad and his wife returned to Hebron. Abu Ahmad went back to his shop, talking about the horrors and real terror he witnessed firsthand, thanking God for their safety. The attendees congratulated him on his safe return, and he again thanked God for the safety of himself, Um Ahmad, their children, and grandchildren.

Not long after, radio announcements declared the death of Jamal Abdel Nasser, a shock to the Palestinian masses who largely saw him as the leader of the Arab nation and their hope. Protests erupted across the homeland, in its camps, cities, and villages, reflecting the deep connection and hope the Palestinian people had placed in Nasser as a unifying figure for the Arab cause.

In the Beach Camp, the education was suspended for several days due to a declared hunger strike; commercial establishments remained shut, and demonstrations roamed, led by a number of teachers and intellectuals from the camp. They chanted for Arab unity and recited the virtues and achievements of the late president, raising his pictures and banners bearing Arab nationalist slogans and mourning Abdel Nasser.

The majority of the camp's inhabitants joined these demonstrations. Men wept, women wailed, and their cries intensified. At the height of its fervor, the demonstration moved outside the camp towards the city's main roads, heading towards the city centre and Omar al-Mukhtar Street. We, the school students, both young and old, boys and girls, joined in chanting: "Long live Arab unity... Palestine is Arab, with our souls, with our blood we redeem you, Jamal." Upon the demonstration's first contact with Omar al-Mukhtar Street, the main artery in Gaza City, it was met by a large force of the occupying army. They began firing at the demonstrators' heads to instill terror, forcing them to disperse and halt their progression. The demonstrators responded with stones, prompting the soldiers to start shooting at their legs, resulting in numerous injuries. The wounded were taken to al-Shifa Hospital and the Agency's clinic, which had been offering medical treatment since the 1967 occupation.

The occupation forces and their apparatus had implemented a series of measures aimed at controlling the areas and stifling the resistance movement. They began a census, issuing personal identity cards to adults, registering children under their parents' names, and mandating the registration of births. A Department of Passports and Permits was established to oversee these and other civil affairs of the citizens and residents.

Lines of communication and understanding were opened with the local chieftains and dignitaries, who were periodically summoned by the area's military governor to discuss the people's living conditions and convey his messages through them. Several of these chieftains or dignitaries would head to the military governor's office, dressed in their traditional robes and mustaches neatly groomed, to be respectfully received by the military governor—unless there had been demonstrations or attacks, in which case he would angrily reprimand them, with the attendees humbly responding with "Yes, your excellency" and similar expressions of deference.

These Mukhtars continued to carry the seals of their office, which were essential for citizens and residents when they needed to conduct any formal transactions.

Whether someone wanted to travel abroad, apply for a permit to open a business, construct a building, or any other official procedure, it was mandatory to seek the Mukhtar of their town, who would stamp the document. Typically, a small fee was collected for this service.

Occupation patrols roamed the areas, armed with military maps, navigating through the intricacies of the regions day and night, on foot and in vehicles, across plains, valleys, mountains, cities, villages, and camps. Soldiers marched in two, three, or four rows, maintaining several meters distance from each other, guns at the ready, constantly looking around. Those at the back occasionally turned around completely to check if anyone was approaching them from behind.

They would march, then pause occasionally; the officer would consult the map before proceeding in a determined direction. Often, they would stop passersby, young men or adults, demanding to see their personal ID cards to identify them. The officer might compare the information against a list of names and ID numbers of individuals wanted for arrest and interrogation pulled from his pocket. Every day or every few days, a convoy of military jeeps, led by an unmarked civilian vehicle (bearing a yellow license plate), would head out, signaling to everyone that they were on their way to raid a house, a farm, or a location to arrest someone from the guerrilla fighters or their helpers. Sometimes, on their return, the arrested person would be seen with his hands tied around a jeep's seat bar, his head covered with a thick, military-colored sack. Sometimes we recognized the person by their clothes, but other times we did not, as they were taken away for interrogation.

Despite these practices, resistance operations continued. Every few days, we would hear that a bomb had been thrown at a patrol, injuring several soldiers. Or a guerrilla might shoot at a military patrol vehicle or foot soldiers with a Carl Gustaf rifle, injuring or killing some. However, the frequent or somewhat apparent presence of armed guerrillas, those whose weapons peeked out from beneath their clothes or who carried them in burlap bags openly in front of residents, made it unmistakably clear that these were arms.

This ongoing tension and the visible measures of resistance against the occupation underscored not only the resilience of the Palestinian people but also the harsh realities of living under constant surveillance and the threat of military action. Despite the oppressive environment, the spirit of resistance among the Palestinian populace never waned, manifesting in both armed struggle and the

daily acts of defiance against the occupation forces' attempts to control and suppress them.

All these manifestations began to gradually disappear as the guerrilla movement became increasingly clandestine. In the early seventies, Unit 101 was formed by General Ariel Sharon and led by Major Meir "Dagan". Known for wearing red berets and popularly referred to as "the red berets", this unit was considered special, undergoing highly specialized training. It became notorious for raiding alleys within camps and citrus groves, shooting at anyone moving under suspicion, attacking people, and assaulting and killing without any legal or moral restraint. This unit played a significant role in combating the resistance and eliminating many of its leaders and members.

The force from this unit consisted of about ten to twenty soldiers, all young men in official military uniform, equipped with new weapons and the best training. They wore red fabric berets, some carried big walkie-talkies on their backs with high antennas, ensuring constant communication with the command and control centre.

One day, one of these units chased a guerrilla after somehow noticing the bomb he was holding and he started running through the camp's alleys to hide. They pursued him, firing shots, racing through the camp, with the soldier carrying the walkie-talkie updating their command centre. They managed to pinpoint the area where the young man disappeared, quickly surrounding it with a massive reinforcement, effectively sealing it off. The residents were ordered to leave their homes, men and women, young and old alike, and were made to sit by the road. An interrogation process began with each person by intelligence officers. Soldiers entered homes, overturning everything in search of the young man or any hideout he might have used. It seems they eventually found the house where the young man was hiding.

The officer and intelligence agents entered and exited, consulting with each other, turning the house upside down. Ultimately, they located the entrance to the shelter where the young man was hiding. They started using loudspeakers to call him out, but no one emerged.

This scenario illustrates the intense and often violent interactions between Israeli forces and Palestinian guerrillas. The measures taken by the Israeli military, particularly the specialized units like the red berets, underscored the lengths to which the occupation forces went to suppress and eliminate any form of

resistance. Despite the danger and the overwhelming odds, the spirit of resistance among Palestinians persisted, manifesting in various forms of defiance against the occupying forces.

As they approached the entrance to the shelter, shots were fired at them, causing the soldiers to retreat. Then, several soldiers from the unit stealthily placed explosives around the location, withdrew, and detonated them, shaking the entire camp. Subsequently, a bulldozer, which demolished the house, began excavating to uncover the shelter and its contents. Eventually, the bodies of four guerrillas who had been hiding in the shelter were extracted.

Over time, the presence of the Popular Liberation Forces diminished, and most resistance fighters became affiliated with Fatah. In some areas, the majority were from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Arrests among men and young people did not cease, especially following the execution of guerrilla operations. There were always some who were released; thus, while one woman's eyes were sore from crying over her husband or son taken away in the night, another rejoiced with ululations upon the return of her husband or son from detention, after days, months, or even years of absence in the darkness of interrogation cells.

The practice of arrest in Hebron began from the early days of the occupation. Senior Israeli leaders visited the home of the city's mayor and prominent figure, Sheikh Muhammad Ali Al-Ja'bari, expressing their respect and asking for his requests. He asked them to ensure their soldiers refrained from violating the honor and property of the people, to which they assured compliance, and a reasonable degree of this commitment was initially observed.

However, in the following days, vast areas of land, mostly owned by the Al-Ja'bari family along with other families, were confiscated. These lands became the site for the construction of Kiryat Arba settlement, halting the completion of the Khalid bin Walid Mosque adjacent to the confiscated lands. The Osman bin Affan school, the old bus garage in the city centre, and the Al-Dabboya building were also seized. These sites were initially used as gathering and staging points, which over time transformed into military bases and launch points for settlers moving towards the Ibrahimi Mosque. The Jews, considering the mosque a sacred place and part of their heritage, coveted complete control over it and aimed to expel Muslims from it.

The enemy began to exhibit intensified military movements over time, yet consistently aimed to avoid clashes with the locals. Efforts were made to develop and solidify their relationships with them, maintaining at least non-hostile relations. The friction caused by some altercations between Arab and Jewish youths concerned some of the senior settlers, such as Rabbi Levinger and others. They approached the local dignitaries for reconciliation, strictly adhering to Arab customs, emphasizing their desire for good neighbourly relations and the continuation of brotherly ties. They would take "Al-Atwa" (a traditional form of truce), agree on compensation, and pay the blood money if necessary, all to keep the Arabs in a state of non-aggression and peace.

Certain areas, particularly the camps close by, like Deheisheh and Aroub camps on the main road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, maintained a level of resistance warmth. Soldiers, military officials, settlers, and tourists using this road occasionally faced guerrilla operations launched from these camps, leading to severe repercussions for the inhabitants: curfews were imposed, men were detained, beaten, and arrested for periods.

The condescending view that city dwellers, especially those from Hebron, had towards camp residents persisted over the years. Despite the occupation displacing these people from their villages and towns, the same occupation now oppresses everyone, whether refugees in their camps or citizens in their cities. Moreover, this superior attitude extended to the surrounding village folks as well, a common sentiment across various regions where city dwellers looked down upon villagers, treating them with superiority except in rare instances.

Villagers and their women plant, harvest, raise livestock, make cheese and yogurt, extract butter, and go down to the city to sell their baskets of figs, grapes, and various fruits, or pots of yogurt or butter, at the city markets for modest prices. Then, they purchase their necessities such as clothing, shoes, soap, and more from the city at higher prices, returning to their villages with a few coins, happy and content, feeling the world could not contain their joy.

The boy and the woman carrying a basket of figs or a basket of eggs await the bus's arrival in the village heart from early morning hours, readying themselves for the journey. Clutching his basket and she cradling a clay jar filled with milk or butter, they board the bus traversing the unpaved rural roads until reaching the paved path leading to the city market. There, merchants take from them what they've brought, and they wander the market, purchasing what pleases them before returning to wait for the bus back to their villages. Upon return to the

village bus stop, some may have to walk long distances back home, even with heavy loads, waiting for a relative or acquaintance to help carry the load on their back, head, or donkey, yet they remain content and happy.

With the opening of employment opportunities for Palestinian workers inside the territories occupied in 1948, these workers began to learn much about the Jewish society's details, customs, traditions, and religion. On Friday afternoons, entering Sabbath until some time after sunset, many do not observe this in their private affairs and homes, but official institutions halt, and lighting or extinguishing fires and electrical devices ceases strictly on their holy day, Yom Kippur. Just before Yom Kippur in 1973, which coincided with October 6th, workers returned home as factories, offices, and institutions were closed.

These workers would gather outside their homes, chatting, joking, drinking tea, and discussing their work, problems, and life matters. While in this state on October 6th, 1973, a neighbour rushed out, radio in hand, shouting that war had broken out between the Arabs and Israel. Everyone was startled, asking, "What? War? With Israel? Which Arabs?" The neighbour urged them to listen to the radio.

The voice of the Egyptian broadcaster thundered, reading the first military statement from the Egyptian Armed Forces' command, announcing the Egyptian attack on Sinai and the Suez Canal shores, and the beginning of controlling the Bar Lev Line. Many rubbed their eyes in disbelief, then joy and happiness erupted with the successive military statements confirming Syria's entry into the war and the Arab advances in battles. Reports of a large number of Israeli aircraft downed by Egyptian and Syrian defenses and the destruction of numerous tanks fueled dreams of victory and return among the camp's residents.

However, these dreams were interrupted by the loudspeakers of the occupying forces announcing a curfew and ordering everyone to stay indoors until further notice. People complied, dreaming this might be the last time they were confined, hoping that in a few days, the liberating Arab armies would arrive. Each family, including ours, gathered around the radio, clinging to every piece of news.

Chapter Ten

The next day after my brother Mahmoud returned to Gaza from his studies in Egypt, another student returning from Egypt for the summer vacation was caught during inspection with a letter containing a list of names of Palestinian youths organized in Egypt for Fatah movement. They were to start organizing guerrilla activities in the Gaza Strip, and Mahmoud's name was on this list. Consequently, he was arrested and interrogated.

The interrogation section in Gaza prison was ominously known as "the slaughterhouse" due to the torture and oppression inflicted on its detainees. It consisted of a building with a corridor approximately four meters wide and twenty meters long, with various-sized rooms on either side where the interrogations took place. Detainees were made to sit or stand along this corridor, their faces to the wall, their heads covered with thick cloth bags down to their shoulders, and their hands tied behind their backs.

Soldiers patrolled among them, continuously beating, kicking, and slapping. If a detainee appeared to doze off or lose focus, they were doused with cold water. Periodically, one of the detainees was dragged into one of the side rooms. Once the bag was removed from their head, they faced a group of interrogators who spoke Arabic with a Hebrew accent, bombarding them with thousands of questions, interspersed with relentless kicking, beating, and slapping.

One of the interrogators played the role of the detainee's "friend," ostensibly rescuing them from the violent attackers who had been beating them, insisting, "Leave him, I'll talk to him. I know beating doesn't help, and I know he wants to confess." They would pretend to try to attack the detainee again, but he would push them out of the room. Then, in a softer tone, he attempted to coax a confession from the detainee, insisting denial was futile since "everything was already known." They threatened more violence and torture if the detainee remained uncooperative, sometimes offering a cigarette or a cup of tea as gestures of false kindness. If he succeeded in extracting a confession, he would ask the detainee to write it down. If unsuccessful, the others would return to continue their harsh methods.

The detainee is thrown on his back, his hands shackled with iron chains behind his back, a cloth sack covering his face and head. One of them sits on his chest to suffocate him and pours water over the sack, another stands on his stomach, and a third places a chair between his legs to keep them apart and sits on the chair, while a fourth presses on his testicles, and two others each hold one of his legs. Thus, in rounds, as soon as one round ends, it is separated from the second round by a few seconds, and he is thrown on a long table in the same manner, subjected to the same methods, and his hands may be shackled with iron chains behind his back. Then his hands are tied to a loop or a pipe fixed in the wall up high, where he is almost hanging, his fingertips barely touching the ground, his head covered with a sack or more, during which he is subjected to punches in the stomach and kicks all over his body, and cold water is poured on him, and sometimes an electric fan is turned on him, causing the detainee to shiver with cold, feeling his body freeze.

Mahmoud was subjected to all these methods and more during the interrogation in the (slaughterhouse) of Gaza's S___, until his body wasted away, and he became thin and no longer recognized himself. Over forty days, he scarcely saw sleep, tasted food, or felt water touch his body. In moments when they wanted to give him a little rest, fearing death, they lowered him into one of the cells, a small room no wider than a meter and a half and no longer than two and a half meters, to find himself in it with five or six detainees who had been exhausted by the interrogation and lack of sleep, lying one on top of the other, sinking into a terrifying sleep, from which they only woke up when the jailers dragged them back to the interrogators.

After weeks of Mahmoud denying any relation to the organizations, to Fatah, or others, they confronted him with a list containing his name and others with a student who came after him from Egypt, and that they had organized there, demanding from them to organize work in the sector. Mahmoud insisted on his denial, asserting that it was merely a framing by untruthful people, so they returned to their old methods of beating, torture, and ghosting, and Mahmoud realized they would not let him go.

He confessed that a person had organized him for Fatah in Egypt, saying they would contact him upon his return to Gaza, and Mahmoud thought that would be the end of it. But then the interrogation started anew.

"Were you trained on any weapons? What missions were you asked to execute? Who did you organize with? Did you recruit others? And who are they?

Thousands of other questions, and in front of his denial of anything of that, the interrogation with him began anew, more severely and harshly. Mahmoud then realized that he made a mistake with his initial confession and that he would have continued to suffer the same torture in any case, so he had to insist on it, without implicating himself in longer prison terms. And so they continued to torture him and other detainees in the interrogation section, where nothing could be heard but the screams of the detainees and the insults and curses of the interrogators all day and night.

After about forty days, they realized they would not get anything additional from him, so they moved him down to the cells, and after weeks, he was transferred to a regular prison. He entered one of the rooms in one of the prison sections, after they handed him some clothes, blankets, two plastic dishes, and a spoon. There, he found in the room about twenty prisoners, some of whom he knew from the camp. There, his brothers welcomed him with comfort and consolation. They each introduced themselves, their name, area, charges, and so on.

The issue that was troubling Mahmoud and causing him concern was seeing my mother and us and reassuring us that he was still alive, and that he was fine. That he wouldn't be sentenced for a very long time, as happens with many who are arrested, enter prison, and never leave. From the first moments, he inquired about family visits, and the young men told him that for the Gaza City area, it happens on the first Friday of every month. He asked about the date today and found out he had to wait another two weeks.

My mother asked some of the neighbours who have detained sons, especially our neighbour Umm al-Abd, if we could take items, food, and clothes to the prison and if they would allow us to bring them in. She was told no. She heard about the number of people allowed for the visit and knew that three adults or two adults and a minor were allowed. That night before the visit, we discussed a lot about who would go with my mother to visit Mahmoud, and each one of us wanted to be the one.

In the end, my mother decided by choosing my sister Fatima, me, and Maryam. Hasan got angry, expressing his dissatisfaction and displeasure, but my mother explained to him that she was worried about him getting into altercations with the soldiers and jailers and that this was our first visit to check out the situation, then we would decide, so he reluctantly agreed."

On Friday morning, as the sun rose, we stood at the side visitation door of the Saraya building, housing the Central Gaza Prison. Arriving early, we found hundreds of families waiting. Next to the wall, there was a barrier made of iron pipes to organize the queue. We all sat in a designated waiting area. A window in the door opened, and a jailer looked out, then opened the door, holding a register in his hand, and began calling out names.

As each prisoner's name was called, their families would stand up, saying: "Yes," and head towards the start of the iron barrier to line up, waiting to enter the building. Every time thirty names were called and their families lined up, he would withdraw inside, and the process of bringing people in for inspection began, separating men from women, then reuniting them after the inspection to enter for the visit.

We waited, eagerly, until my brother Mahmoud's name was called in the fifth group. We said, "Yes," and stood in line until our group was complete, then they began letting us in. There were no adult men with us, so we all went to the women's inspection device, where female soldiers searched my mother, my sisters, and me. Then we were led into a courtyard where we waited for the others to complete their inspection.

We saw the group that entered before us coming out from the visit, then we were taken through long, dimly lit corridors until we reached the visitation area, a concrete wall with holes covered by iron mesh on both sides of the wall separating us from the detainees. The young ones entered first, running, and the adults walked slowly. I ran with the younger ones, each of us searching for our father or brother. I found my brother Mahmoud sitting behind one of the windows and screamed, "Yama (Mom), it's Mahmoud, Yama it's (Mahmoud)." My scream rose, but my mother didn't hear me, though she saw me standing in front of the window and came over with my sisters Fatima and Mariam.

My mother bombarded Mahmoud with thousands of questions about his condition, his health, whether they had beaten him, whether he was fed, how his body was, whether they had paralyzed his legs or arms. An endless stream of questions without waiting for the answers!! Tears flowed as Mahmoud tried to calm her down, signaling with his hands, saying, "All is well, Mom, all is well. I'm fine, and here I am before you, my body is fine, my legs are fine, I'm all fine. How are you, and how are my siblings? How are you, Fatima, how are you, Mariam?" Fatima mumbled as she wiped her tears, "I'm fine, my brother, I'm fine," and Mariam replied, "Thank God."

My mother started asking him about his case and the court? He answered her that it was simple and, God willing, the sentence would not exceed a year or a year and a half. My mother gasped, almost losing her soul from her sides, exclaiming: "A year or a year and a half, oh woe to me," so Mahmoud began to calm her down and tried to reassure her, telling her that she had appointed a lawyer for him. The jailers standing behind us and on the other side began to clap and scream: "The visit is over, the visit is over" (We managed to exchange greetings once more, and the jailers rounded up Mahmoud and other prisoners, pulling them behind the door and began to push us, the families, outside.

What I gained from this visit was that I saw Mahmoud; he asked me about my condition, and I asked him about his. When he said goodbye to my mother, "Goodbye, Ahmed," and all the time, the questions about well-being reminded me and he said: with whom my mother and reassurance from Mahmoud and discussion about the case and the sentence and the important thing is that since this visit, we felt that my mother's psychological condition had stabilized and she began to return to her normal self.

Mahmoud was placed in Section (B) in Gaza Prison, which consists of eight rooms opening onto a long corridor three meters wide. The rooms' size varies between fifteen square meters and twenty-five, with several small windows and their doors made of iron bars. In one corner, there's a toilet. Each room houses at least twenty prisoners who spread blankets on the floor and sleep on them side by side, as there's not enough room for anyone to lie on their back, nor can they turn over unless they get up, stand, and then turn themselves to lie on the other side. If one of them leaves his place for the necessity of going to the bathroom, he must step over the sleepers, and upon returning, he finds his place lost as the others have shifted into it.

At six in the morning, it is announced over the loudspeakers that the count will begin shortly, the lights are turned on, and the jailers start knocking on the doors to wake up the prisoners. Each of them must wake up, fold his belongings, arrange them, and sit in wait for the count. If one of them is late and his fellows do not wake him, the jailers open the door and enter, kicking him with their feet with all harshness and brutality.

A large number of jailers led by an officer count the prisoners, where the prisoners must stand in two lines. The jailers carry batons, wear helmets, one of them carries a tear gas gun, and they count the prisoners room by room, then proceed to count the other sections.

In the end, the loudspeakers announce the completion of the count, and breakfast is served, usually consisting of two or three slices of bread, a little butter, some jam, and sometimes half a boiled egg, along with a cup of something that tastes and smells like tea. The prisoners eat their meal after having gone to the bathroom one after another, and sometimes one of them needs to use the bathroom, clutching his stomach in pain and pleading with his cellmate to leave because his condition is deteriorating.

The jailers come to the rooms one by one to take the inmates out in groups of two rooms at a time to the courtyard (the "fora"), a space surrounded by high walls with a roof covered in barbed wire, measuring about one hundred and twenty square meters. The prisoners come out one by one, each placing his hands behind his back and bowing his head, into the courtyard. There, the jailers stand with sticks in the middle of the yard, and the prisoners start walking around the courtyard in a circle. Anyone who opens his mouth to speak with a colleague, falls behind, or moves ahead, receives his share of beating with batons, kicking, and slapping. They walk in this manner for an hour or less, then back to their rooms. Each must sit on his folded blanket, and they are forbidden from sitting in circles or groups to talk or study. If they do, the jailers storm the room and beat them severely, and some may be taken to solitary confinement cells, known as "snookats."

The noon count is announced, and after the count, lunch is served: a few slices of bread and vegetable broth, sometimes containing vegetables like carrots, or it might just be hot water tasting of salt. Sometimes mashed potatoes, rice, or slices of eggplant are served. The serving is so scanty it barely touches the prisoners. They eat their lunch, some wash the dishes, and others sit leaning against the wall, eyelids heavy with drowsiness from the monotony and boredom, and if a jailer sees someone nodding off, he yells at them to stay awake, as sleeping is only allowed at night.

Hours pass heavily until dinner is served, barely visible on the plate. Just before five o'clock, the prisoners eat and then sit waiting for dusk. About an hour or an hour and a half after sunset, after the evening count has been conducted in the same manner, the jailers turn off the lights, and the prisoners lay down side by side, ready for sleep. A jailer always looks in, monitoring the rooms, his footsteps echoing on the floor, as if refusing to allow them even the peace of sleep at night...

On Thursdays, prisoners are taken in groups of four to the showers at the end of the section, where each person has five minutes for their weekly shower. The water is rarely hot, and the poor-quality piece of soap must suffice for a quarter of the prisoners in the section. After the showers, the jailer gives each room a single razor blade for everyone to shave their beards with....

Friday is the day for family visits. Each region of the Gaza Strip has its turn on one of the Fridays. In the morning, those expecting visits prepare and wait for the loudspeakers mounted on the walls of the section to call out the names of the visitors, batch by batch. Those whose names are called exit the rooms after the jailers unlock them. They are gathered from all sections into a waiting room, searched one by one, then led into the visitation area where the jailers forcefully pull them in for another round of inspections, and prisoners from each section are separated. Back in their rooms, their fellow inmates greet them with congratulations and blessings for the visit, to which they respond, "God bless you, may you have the same."

This harsh and bitter reality is what my brother Mahmoud encountered and lived through in Gaza Prison, which was nearly bursting with hundreds of prisoners from all over the Gaza Strip. The prison administration forbids any form of organized community life and deprives prisoners of their most basic rights guaranteed by human rights laws and the Geneva Conventions. Anyone who tries to object faces beatings and harsh treatment beyond what one could imagine.

On the day of the court, the jailers come to inform Mahmoud and the other prisoners that they must prepare to go to court. Within minutes, they are taken out of their rooms, subjected to a thorough search, then their hands are shackled with iron cuffs (handcuffs) behind their backs, and their legs are also shackled. They are then dragged into the nearby military court, located at the other end of the prison building, where they are placed in a waiting room. They are brought one by one into the courtroom, where they are kept in a defendant's cage guarded by soldiers. In the centre of the room is a large table with three chairs behind it and the Israeli flag in the background. Military officers enter as judges, and one of the soldiers shouts, "Stand," requiring everyone in the room, including the families sitting on the other side, with soldiers' guns pointed at them, to stand up. The court proceedings begin, where the role of the lawyer is almost negligible.

Mahmoud sneaks glances between dozens of soldiers towards my mother, uncle, and brother Hassan, who are sitting among the families, trying to force a reassuring smile on his face. My mother tries to respond with a faint, gloomy

smile that can't hide her anxiety and anticipation of what's to come. The court sessions pass one after the other without results, and each time, the prisoners return to the prison under the same procedures where their fellow inmates, curious about what happened, try to reassure themselves. If one of them receives a sentence, they try to console him by saying that freedom is near, that prison doesn't break men, and that this is the price of national belonging.

The conditions of life were unbearably harsh, and the jailers' reactions to any attempt at objection were harsher than imaginable. Often, a prisoner's head was broken for questioning whether the food was fit for human consumption or sufficient for twenty. His hands were often broken for turning to look at another room's door while passing in the line to the yard, and his eyes often bruised because three or four sat in a corner of their room in a circle, breaking the rule of interaction.

Three or four prisoners, including Mahmoud, began discussing the situation, each sitting in their place to avoid provoking the jailers, searching for a way to end this reality. It was clear to them all that using violence and force was not in their favor, as they had only their hands, while the jailers possessed batons, shields, helmets, tear gas, and all forms of brutality and inhumanity. What to do? They concluded that the only way to change this reality was an open-ended hunger strike. Through the hunger strike, they would enter a battle of wills and the ability to endure the pains of hunger and the wait for death, thereby overcoming the jailer's arrogance and forcing him to change his treatment equation.

The decision was made, and coordination began. They asked the prisoner worker, who went out to distribute food, to steal a pen from the jailers and arrange for some paper. After several attempts, he succeeded, hiding the pen and papers in a corner of the room not easily seen by the jailers during their patrols. The process of writing letters that would be directed to other sections to coordinate the strike collectively, in all sections, to start at the same moment, began.

On the day of the visit, some prisoners carried the letters, passing through the inspection with them wrapped in nylon and easily hidden in their mouths. In the waiting room, the letters were distributed to young men from other sections, each carefully placing the letter in his mouth and exchanging them with extreme caution. If someone noticed a jailer's movement in the corridor and coming closer, they would cough or stamp their feet on the ground, hiding the letter. Once a room finished with it, the letter was folded again, awaiting the next food

delivery to pass it on, starting the process of circulation and reading. Within two weeks, all prisoners were informed and prepared for the strike.

On the morning of Sunday, after the count and the arrival of food, the usual prisoner assigned to distribute the food took it and stood at the door of the first room, saying, "Food, guys." They replied, "We don't want any, we're on strike." The jailer was surprised and called his colleague to inform the authorities, and the youths were instructed to proceed to the next room with the same message, "Food, guys," and received the same response, "We don't want any, we're on strike," and so on through the third, fourth, and the rest of the rooms, and likewise in the rest of the sections.

The jailers were enraged, and the prison director and his officers rushed to the sections with a large force of jailers carrying batons, shields, and gas. The director shouted at the jailer, "Open the door," and upon opening the first room's door, he ordered, "Bring the food." The prisoner brought the food, and the director began asking the prisoners one by one if they wanted food, to which they all answered, "No." He asked the second, who replied, "No," and so on through several rooms in most of the sections, without finding anyone willing to eat or receive food. They only drank water and a few grains of salt.

Lunch and dinner were not received, and the second and third days passed. After one and two weeks, the prisoners began to weaken, their bodies wasted away, and their eyes sunk in their sockets. Every day or every few days, the director or one of his officers would try to find someone who had broken down or was ready to eat, to no avail. It became clear that the prisoners were determined to continue the confrontation. The matter was undoubtedly escalated to higher authorities. The director came asking each prisoner about their demands, receiving a uniform answer from everyone, "I'm not authorized to speak about this; talk to the committee 'Mahmoud Al-Saleh,' 'Hassan Thabat,' and 'Abdul Aziz Shah,'" leading the director to shout, "There are no committees here. We do not recognize committees, nor do we acknowledge you. You are saboteurs and criminals..."

A third week passed, and it became clear that the situation was escalating. It was evident that there was a real danger to the lives of the prisoners, which would undoubtedly create intense pressure on Israel in international forums and the global media. It was unacceptable for these individuals to die without cause, nor was it desirable to showcase the Palestinian struggle in such a heroic and dignified manner. Negotiations with the committee began, summoned to the prison director's office where a feast of delicious food was laid out on the table. The

prison management team, led by the director, sat opposite the three prisoners, each barely able to stay seated but struggling to muster the last bits of strength in their weakened bodies.

The director offered them food, which they politely and kindly declined, stating they were on strike like their brothers and would be the last to eat if their demands were met. "What are your demands?" Stop the policy of beating and physical assault, allow sitting in the rooms as we wish, permit daytime sleep, freedom in the courtyard to walk or gather, requests for mattresses for sleeping, improved and increased quantity of food, double the cleaning supplies, increase bathroom time to twice a week, allow notebooks, pens, and books, among other demands. The demands were recorded and promises were made to respond at a later date. The three men struggled to stand, escorted by jailers whose faces showed increasing astonishment day by day at the resolve and determination of these men to face death willingly.

Two days later, the committee was summoned again, and the director announced the stance on those demands. Some were accepted, others rejected. The committee members stood up, declaring their intention to leave, stating, "This is not enough, and the strike continues." Attempts were made to persuade them to stay for further dialogue on other demands, but the refusal was firm: "We want a complete response to our demands."

The next day, the committee was called back and presented with responses that agreed to most of the requests. The committee gave a preliminary agreement to suspend the strike but asked to be allowed to tour the sections to inform the prisoners of the outcomes and hear their opinions. The request was initially denied, but after a few hours, the committee was called again and informed that they would be allowed to tour the sections accompanied by an officer. They went from section to section, room by room, greeting the prisoners, informing them of the developments, and obtaining their consent to end the strike. They completed their tour of the entire prison.

After confirming the end of the strike, the prisoners were ready to accept food, but it was decided that for the first three days, they should only have liquids. This gradual approach was necessary because their stomachs and intestines, which had not been in use for weeks, were not ready for regular food. This recommendation was made by one of the doctors among the prisoners.

After the first meal, the prisoners in each room held a collective sitting in a circle. In room 7 of section B, Mahmoud spoke about the victory achieved, emphasizing that if men are determined and ready to die, nothing can stand in their way, and victory will surely be theirs. He talked about the Palestinian revolution that started from the will and readiness of men alone, echoing the Fatah movement's slogan that only its men can liberate the land, just as our ancestors said, "Only its oxen plow the land." The next day, the prisoners went out to the courtyard without the presence of jailers and their batons, each doing as they pleased, walking or sitting, in twos, threes, or fours, without any intervention. A jailer stood on a nearby roof, observing the situation without interfering.

In the following period, cultural, religious, and educational gatherings in prison became very common. In one room, there was a session discussing Palestinian history; in another, a political session about the latest developments; in a third, a session about the principles, slogans, and objectives of the Fatah movement; and in a fourth, a session on socialist thought and Marxist philosophy. The prison transformed into an advanced school where learners taught others, and those inexperienced in debate and political thought were trained. A clear political and ideological thought began to crystallize among the prisoners according to their political affiliations, with three distinct groups emerging: the group of the Popular Liberation Forces with its Leninist tendencies, the Fatah group with its pure national approach, and the Popular Front group with its Marxist leftist stance.

Chapter Eleven

As Mahmoud's release date approached, my mother started preparing to welcome him back and celebrate his triumphant return. We whitewashed the house again, and she prepared fenugreek, basbousa, and other varieties of food, and we began once again to talk about the projects and ambitions we had discussed upon his return from Egypt.

On the day of his release, we all waited in full gear in front of the Saraya gate... He appeared from the gate in the midday hours, and when he saw us, he ran towards us, and we ran towards him, welcoming him with hugs while muttering prayers of thanks for his safety. As usual, my mother was late. Mahmoud reached her, kissing her head and hands as she tried to stop him, saying, "No, my engineer." Then we headed home, heads held high, and whenever we passed someone we knew, they would stop quickly or turn to us and come over to congratulate Mahmoud, embracing him and saying, "Thank God for your safety, my engineer." As we reached the edge of our neighbourhood, the whole community was waiting for us, welcoming Mahmoud like a liberating hero, and the celebrations and congratulations continued for several days.

No sooner had our celebrations of Mahmoud's return from prison ended than new celebrations began for his employment at the Agency, where he started working as a building inspector and civil engineer on various projects. It was clear that the heavens had opened for us after a long period of hardship, as the job at the Agency came with a very generous salary.

Just as our celebrations for Mahmoud's job concluded, another joy arrived with the engagement of my sister Fatima to one of Mahmoud's colleagues. This was followed by their wedding. On the day of Fatima's wedding, after she moved to her husband's house and we returned from the wedding celebration to our home, we felt as if a corner of our home had been demolished. Fatima had filled our lives so much that I personally felt as if my heart had been torn from my chest. But over time, we got used to her absence, especially after knowing she was happy in her marriage.

Shortly after, Abdul Hafiz, our neighbour and the son of Umm Al-Abd, who had been imprisoned on charges of affiliation and work for the Popular Front, was released. The neighbourhood welcomed him with a celebration no less grand

than the one for my brother Mahmoud, and his mother, Umm Al-Abd, had also prepared sweets to celebrate his release.

Mahmoud's reception of Abdel Hafiz was very strange. On one hand, it was extremely warm since they had lived together in prison and had gone through the strike and suffering together, making them close friends. On the other hand, there was an evident sharp rivalry between them as they quickly criticized each other, cutting off the conversation when it touched on political and ideological positions.

Months after Mahmoud's job started, my mother insisted on beginning our projects by constructing a new room suitable for the engineer and for his friends, colleagues, and the youth and men of the neighbourhood who came to visit him. Indeed, we hired a builder, bought the necessary materials, and built a spacious room with high walls, roofed with asbestos, featuring several large windows and an excellent wooden door. The floor was raised and paved with cement.

My mother then insisted on buying a bed. Although it was second-hand, it was a breakthrough in our household's evolution. Mahmoud slept on it, and sometimes one of us would lie on it for a while. Then they bought a table and two chairs, marking a noticeable development in our home. Then the talk about Mahmoud's marriage intentions began to increase, and my mother discussed with him the type of girl he wanted. Did he want a specific girl? What qualities did he seek in his bride?

The resistance had begun to wane as many were arrested and many martyred, and the world opened up to people, distracting them, in addition to the significant successes achieved by Israeli intelligence against the resistance, capturing large quantities of weapons and ammunition. It seems that their level of information and understanding of the Palestinian reality had greatly increased, enabling them to restrict and diminish the resistance. The Popular Liberation Forces began to weaken significantly as they were a military organization at their core without the organizational depth, external support, and presence limited to the Gaza Strip without extending to the West Bank. Over time, they started to occupy the position held by Fatah and the Popular Front.

Mahmoud's welcome for Abdel Hafiz was peculiar. On one hand, it was very warm as they had lived together in prison and shared the experiences of the strike and suffering, becoming close friends. On the other hand, it was evident there

was a sharp rivalry between them, quickly moving to criticism when discussing political and ideological stances.

Months into Mahmoud's employment, my mother insisted on starting our projects by building a new room fit for an engineer and his visitors, friends, colleagues, and men of the neighbourhood. Indeed, we hired a builder, bought the necessary materials, and constructed a spacious room with high walls, an asbestos roof, several large windows, and an excellent wooden door, with a raised, cement-paved floor.

After that, my mother insisted on buying a bed. Though it was second-hand, it was a significant upgrade in our household. Mahmoud slept on it, and sometimes one of us would lay on it for a while. Then, a table and two chairs were bought, marking a noticeable advancement in our home. Discussions about Mahmoud's marriage intentions began, with my mother inquiring about the type of girl he wanted and the qualities he sought in his bride.

The resistance's intensity began to wane as many were arrested or martyred. People were distracted by the world opening up and the significant successes Israeli intelligence achieved against the resistance, capturing large quantities of arms and ammunition. Their increased knowledge and understanding of the Palestinian reality allowed them to constrain and diminish the resistance. The Popular Liberation Forces began to weaken significantly as a military organization without the same organizational depth and external support, confined to Gaza without a presence in the West Bank. Over time, they started to occupy the positions of Fatah and the Popular Front.

With the arrest and imprisonment of many young men, intellectual and political currents began to emerge, leading to sharp intellectual and political discussions among these youths, their families, and in circles believed to be out of Israeli intelligence's reach. It became clear that some adopted Fatah's viewpoint and its ideas, while others followed the Popular Front's perspective and ideology.

Abdel Hafiz often visited our house, sitting with others in Mahmoud's room to engage in intellectual discussions. Abdel Hafiz, a socialist Marxist, advocated for this ideology, discussing historical materialism (dialectic) and citing works by Marx, Lenin, or Engels, talking about the Soviet Union's support for our people and rights, and the support from socialist countries for our cause, emphasizing the need to leverage this friendship and support. Mahmoud adopted a different viewpoint, arguing that our cause could not afford to be divided into different

ideological currents. He believed everyone was free to choose their ideology, but our efforts should unite under the banner of the national liberation movement Fatah, which accommodates the religious, secular, communist, Christian, Muslim, and everyone, rejecting ideological differences.

Whenever they gathered at our house, Umm Al-Abd's house, or stood at the street corner, these discussions would erupt, voices rising, each staunchly defending their position, sometimes heatedly, but eventually ending with tea and returning to their daily lives and concerns.

On the other hand, Sheikh Ahmad started inviting young men to pray and come to the mosque. They began to frequent the mosque for prayers, then sit in a circle to read the Quran or study religious books on the Prophet's biography, jurisprudence, or hadith. Sheikh Ahmad would explain, interpret, and train the young men around him, who received his teachings eagerly. He guided these young men, who then spread out, bringing new youths to the mosque, thus expanding the circle.

My brother Hassan was the kindest-hearted among us and the most willing to sacrifice for others. He took on the responsibility of supporting the household and covering Mahmoud's educational expenses in Egypt through his work at the vegetable stall and his continued education, accepting to study at the Agency's vocational school despite having excellent grades in his high school certificate. Given a suitable opportunity, he could have studied engineering or science, but circumstances forced him to accept vocational studies, continuing to bear the vegetable stall's burden while nearing graduation from the lathe and milling section of the vocational school.

While working at the vegetable stall, Hassan became acquainted with Sheikh Ahmad, who bought his household needs from him several times and noticed his good character and genuine nature. The Sheikh invited him to pray and frequent the mosque, reminding him of the afterlife, warning against disobedience to Allah and the pursuit of worldly pleasures, and asserting that the path of religion and righteousness is the best and shortest path to happiness, success in this life, and salvation in the hereafter. Hassan was moved by these words, promising the Sheikh he would start praying and attending the mosque. Indeed, from that evening, Hassan began to perform ablution and pray, going to the mosque for prayer whenever possible.

He usually went to the mosque for the Maghrib prayer and stayed there until he had performed the Isha prayer. After Isha, he would return home. The matter was very well received by our family, especially by my mother, as prayer and mosque attendance were beyond reproach. Hassan, being mature and aware, there was no concern for him. Sometimes, he would participate in the discussions between my brother Mahmoud, our neighbour Abdel Hafiz, and other youths, where he was particularly sharp in his debate against Abdel Hafiz, accusing him of atheism, disbelief, and infidelity. It was evident that Abdel Hafiz was stronger in his intellectual presentation, as his cultural level was much higher than Hassan's, and it seems that his time in prison had endowed Abdel Hafiz with these intellectual capabilities. He would attack the religious thinking approach, claiming religion to be the opium of the masses and a numbing agent. "Where are the religious people, and what is their role in the national struggle and resistance against occupation?" Hassan's responses were weak, and he often clashed with Mahmoud in these discussions, urging the return to religion and adherence to it during the liberation process, citing a statement attributed to Omar Ibn Al-Khattab that the state of this nation's end would only be rectified with what rectified its beginning. Mahmoud responded strongly, affirming that there is no doubt or objection to religion, but we are in a phase of national liberation, and we must not be distracted by any ideological or religious disagreement, leaving Hassan speechless, unable to respond. Mahmoud then asked, "What about the Christians among our people? Where do they stand in the national struggle? How will you deal with them if we declare and start the conflict?"

The next day, Hassan returned from the mosque with several books, one discussing and dismissing Marxist thought and socialist theories, another discussing the economic system in Islam, and a third on creed. He placed them beside him, flipping through them, searching for answers to the questions he had failed to address in the previous day's conversation.

Mahmoud began to notice changes in Hassan and occasionally sat with him, inquiring about the mosque and its activities, trying to advise Hassan to keep away from those groups. When Hassan did not heed his advice, Mahmoud attempted to use our mother's influence to deter Hassan from interacting with those groups, introducing terms like "Ikhwanjee" (Muslim Brotherhood affiliates). Mahmoud warned that Sheikh Ahmad and his group, frequenting the mosque and participating in seminars and exchanging religious books, were part of the Muslim Brotherhood. He expressed to our mother his fear of Hassan becoming "Ikhwanjee," cautioning that the Brotherhood does not believe in Arab

nationalism, opposes Gamal Abdel Nasser, and has attempted to assassinate him. Moreover, regimes and governments are against them, pursuing and disliking them, and if Hassan were to become associated with them, he would unjustifiably endanger himself.

My mother would call Hassan to sit with him and inquire about what she heard from Mahmoud, especially regarding the Muslim Brotherhood. Hassan categorically denied being a member of the Brotherhood or that anyone from the mosque had discussed the Brotherhood with him, or that he had overheard anyone talking about it. He explained that the mosque activities were limited to praying, learning the Quran, and studying aspects of religion. "Is that wrong?" he asked, to which his mother replied no, advising him to be cautious and avoid troublesome matters. Hassan reassured her, leaving her content in the end.

I heard many of these incidents, whether between Mahmoud and Hassan, Mahmoud and our mother, or Hassan and our mother. Mahmoud's discussions were more convincing to my mind, but Hassan's kindness and simple approach to matters were more comforting and reassuring. Perhaps sensing this, Hassan began encouraging me to pray and accompany him to the mosque. Sometimes I prayed, sometimes I did not, and I frequently joined him at the mosque, sitting in the "circle" sessions held between Maghrib and Isha prayers, which were led by Sheikh Ahmad. I attended several sessions, including interpretations of Quranic Chapters like Surah Az-Zumar and Al-Muddathir.

Sheikh Ahmad's words were impactful and beautiful as he described the scenes of the Day of Judgment, the torments and pleasures of the afterlife, and how the Prophet Muhammad received his Lord's commands to carry the banner of the call to Islam and proclaim it boldly.

Hassan graduated from vocational school and immediately found work in a metalworking and machining workshop in the Zeitoun area of Gaza, earning a reasonable salary with the promise of an increase if he proved his technical skills. It became clear that we were entering a golden era of our lives after years of poverty and hardship.

At that time, I was about to finish my middle school studies, my cousin Ibrahim had started high school, and my brother Mohammed was in his second year of the scientific high school stream. Tahani had finished her high school diploma and had registered to attend the Teachers' Training College in Gaza, waiting for the results during that period. It seemed as though life was smiling at us again.

After years of absence, my cousin Hassan (re)appeared but in a new form. He had grown into a big man, had grown out his beard and hair, and wore strange, almost frightening clothes, similar to the attire of the Jews. He wore a gold chain around his neck, a thick gold bracelet around his wrist, wore a worn-out cowboy pants at the knees, and held a pack of cigarettes in his hands. He seemed completely from another planet. He knocked on the door, and when I opened it, I didn't recognize him at first. He ran his fingers through my hair, scattering it, and said, "You're Ahmad," and I recognized him by his voice. "You're Hassan?" "Yes," he replied, and I shouted, "Mom, Mahmoud, cousin Hassan has returned to our house."

Everyone came running out of their rooms towards the entrance, and Hassan had already stepped two or three steps inside. Everyone who came out running stopped as if struck by lightning, unsure what to say. Mahmoud was the first to recover from the shock, went forward to greet and embrace him. Ibrahim greeted him, and Mahmoud led him by the hand into his room, followed by Ibrahim, Hassan, my brother Mohammed, and I, while my mother went to prepare tea.

We sat in the room, and Mohammed began to inquire about what had happened to him and how things turned out for him. Hassan told us he was living in Tel Aviv, working in a factory owned by his Jewish girlfriend's father, that his situation was excellent, and that he was renting a great apartment in Jaffa. The significant thing was his heavy tongue when speaking Arabic, frequently using Hebrew words in his conversation.

My mother brought in the tea and placed it on the table. He asked her, "How are you, my uncle's wife?" "Thank God," she replied. He then said, "The important thing, my uncle's wife, is that you benefited well. You got out of the refugee camp, saw the world, lived, and took your comfort instead of the misery and deprivation of the camp." My mother sarcastically responded, "Ah, so I saw the world with your Jewish girlfriend."

Hassan said, "So what if she's Jewish?" Mahmoud intervened, asking, "So, Hassan, what next?" Hassan replied, "There's no next or before. I just came to greet you all and see if Ibrahim needs anything." He then reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and from it, he took out a large bundle of cash, counted out a significant amount, and extended his hand towards Ibrahim with the money.

Ibrahim didn't move, and we all remained silent. Hassan insisted, "Take it, Ibrahim." Ibrahim responded, "No, thank you. I want to live with my uncle's

family like anyone else here; I lack nothing." Hassan said, "Take it, I'm your brother." Ibrahim replied, "You're my brother when you come back to live with us and leave the Jews and their lifestyle." Hassan retorted, "Take it easy, Ibrahim. Do you want me to return to the refugee camp? Why don't you come with me?" Ibrahim refused, "I seek refuge with Allah," to which Hassan replied, "As you wish."

Mahmoud tried to engage Hassan in a conversation, attempting to convince him to return home, reminding him that his home still awaits him, and he could rebuild and arrange it. He suggested that they could find him a good wife and a respectable job. Hassan smiled throughout, indicating his refusal, and then left after a lukewarm farewell.

My mother kept trying to convince Mahmoud of the necessity of marriage, but he evaded the topic, claiming that the house was too small and unsuitable for marriage. She tried to persuade him that this would be temporary until we could expand. Now, the house had three rooms: his new room, the two old rooms we had repaired (where she, Tahani, and Mariam lived in one, and Hassan, Mohammed, I, and my cousin Ibrahim lived in the other), and he could marry and live with his wife in the new room.

Mahmoud wondered where guests or visitors would sit, to which she replied they could sit in the boys' room or in her and the girls' room. "Isn't this how all refugee camp families live?" Moreover, they had her uncle's house, where they could repair a room for expansion. Indeed, it was agreed to repair two rooms in my uncle's house, one for Mahmoud and his wife, and the second for Hassan when he gets married, while the new room would remain for receiving guests.

Following the construction of the two new rooms, Mahmoud suggested to my mother that his wedding be postponed for several more months so that he and Hassan could marry at the same time. This way, instead of bearing the costs of two weddings, they would hold a single celebration, thus saving on Hassan's wedding expenses. Hassan, being kind-hearted and having sacrificed his education for Mahmoud and the family, deserved a shared celebration. My mother was convinced by the idea and began to discuss it with Hassan, assuring him that everything was ready and the wedding would take place.

After days of persuasion and pressure, Hassan agreed, and my mother engaged in lengthy discussions with each of them about who they wanted to marry or the qualities they sought in a bride. She suggested several girls, visiting their homes to

see the daughters, assess the cleanliness and orderliness of the houses, and gauge the families' habits, but she was not satisfied with the level she found.

Tahani suggested that my mother consider one of her classmates from the Teachers' Training College, a girl as beautiful as the full moon, of good character, and from a family of our social standing. The girl's family was simple and respectable. My mother and Tahani agreed to visit the girl's home. They went, and my mother returned very pleased, having found the perfect bride for Mahmoud. The only thing left was for Mahmoud to like her, the girl to agree, and her family to consent. And who would refuse Mahmoud Al-Saleh, the engineer? My mother described the girl to Mahmoud, who expressed his preliminary approval, pending a final decision after seeing the girl.

My mother visited the home of Mohammed Al-Saeed again, where she spoke with Mohammed's mother about the honor of proposing to their daughter, "Widad," for Mahmoud. After brief consultations at home, Mohammed's mother welcomed them and agreed on an appointment for the upcoming Friday afternoon.

On Friday, my uncle came to participate in the delegation, along with my sister Fatima. My mother, Mahmoud, Hassan, Tahani, and the rest prepared and headed to the bride's home. Traditionally, the men sat in one room and the women in another, with plenty of welcoming words and compliments. Eventually, Mahmoud and Widad saw each other, and each expressed admiration and agreement.

Joyful ululations filled the air as they were announced engaged, and it was agreed that the wedding and marriage contract would be held in two months, allowing us time to complete the necessary arrangements, especially finding a bride for Hassan, and for Widad to finish her diploma at the Teachers' Training College and receive her certificate.

My mother continued her search for a suitable bride for Hassan, day after day examining one girl after another but finding fault with each for various reasons. After each exploration trip, she returned to report her findings to Hassan, with Tahani accompanying her.

After much effort, Hassan confronted her with the question, "Why are you troubling yourself so much?" Angrily, she retorted, "Why shouldn't I trouble myself? Are you not worth it, Hassan?!" Laughing, Hassan clarified, "Don't misunderstand me, mom. I mean, the bride has been right under our noses all

along." Surprised, she asked, "Who? What do you mean?" Hassan revealed, "Suad, Am Al-Abd's daughter, our neighbour." My mother smiled and teased, "Really? You've liked her all this time, Sheikh Hassan?" Blushing, Hassan admitted, "You know me well, mom. I've never looked at her that way since we grew up, but she's beautiful, respectable, and just as disadvantaged as we are, just like the saying goes, 'The clay of your land is for your own brick.'"

Confirming his seriousness, my mother inquired if he truly wanted Suad. Hassan affirmed, and after discussing with Tahani, who was surprised but agreed Suad was beautiful and respectable, my mother decided to propose to Suad for Hassan first thing the next morning.

True to her word, early the next morning, my mother straightforwardly asked Am Al-Abd for Suad's hand in marriage for Hassan. Am Al-Abd requested time until the afternoon to consult her daughter and sons. In the afternoon, my mother returned to Am Al-Abd's house for her response, and their mutual joy was evident from their celebratory ululations, attracting congratulations from the nearby neighbours.

Preparations for the wedding began in earnest, with purchasing furniture for the newlyweds' home and preparing trousseaus for both. My mother tirelessly worked, visiting Am Al-Abd's house, Abu Mohammad Al-Saeed's house, and the town centre for shopping, until everything was ready for the marriage contract signing and the wedding ceremony.

It was up to me, Mohammed, and my cousin Ibrahim to prepare many things. We rented several straw chairs and transported them on a cart, placing them in front of the door. We bought a large amount of meat, two bags of rice, and gathered a significant number of trays from neighbours, labeling each with the family's name to avoid confusion. My mother supervised several of our neighbours who came to help prepare the food. We prepared the wedding platform by connecting several tables next to the wall, covering them with mats and placing two borrowed bamboo chairs on them, which we covered with prayer rugs. We arranged for a long extension cord for electricity from one of the distant houses that had power, as not every home had electricity. We had rented a string of colorful lights to hang above the wedding platform. Everything was ready by afternoon when the guests began to arrive.

Women sat inside the house, and men sat under the canopy we set up in the street. The sound of women singing and ululating never ceased. Then, we began

serving the food - trays of yellow rice topped with red meat. Me, Mohammed, and Ibrahim stood with soap pieces and clay water jugs, with cotton towels over our shoulders, ready to assist guests with washing their hands after eating. After eating, many guests left, and the families of the bride and groom went back to their homes, waiting for us to go for the marriage contract signing and to escort the newlyweds to their home. Only the closest relatives and friends remained, and the women started walking towards the new home, singing and ululating. As they neared "Abu Mohammed's" house, they began singing the popular folk song, welcoming and celebrating the union.

When the women reached the door, ululations burst from inside the house. The men entered a room where the sheikh, who was to officiate the marriage contract, awaited. After the formalities were completed and the bride was ready, the men waited at the door. The bride, escorted by her father and brother, was handed over to my brother Mahmoud amid a crescendo of joyful ululations, and the procession made its way back home.

Upon entering the house, the bride was surrounded by a group of women, singing and ululating. The procession then moved on to fetch the second bride, Saad, following the same procedures. Her brothers handed her over to Hassan, who led her towards their new home amidst songs and joy.

The brides were prepared for the wedding procession in the same room. My mother suggested that Mahmoud and Hassan ascend to the wedding platform to await their brides' arrival side by side. While Mahmoud had no issues with this, Hassan vehemently refused, citing religious reasons against sitting in a place where women would dance in front of him. Surprised and pleading, my mother couldn't understand his refusal on such a joyous occasion. After much discussion, Fatima proposed a compromise: the grooms would sit on the platform for a half-hour without any dancing, only singing and ululations, after which they would leave and the celebration would continue among the women.

Agreeing to the compromise, Mahmoud and Hassan ascended the platform, and once the brides joined them, the room was filled with singing and ululations. My mother was moved to tears throughout, comforted by Fatima and Taha. They reminisced about how their father would have loved to witness this day, reopening old wounds of loss.

After changing their wedding attire, the newlyweds prepared to leave, removing one chair from the platform, allowing the women to continue celebrating.

Mahmoud teased Hassan for his conservative stance, jokingly calling him a true Muslim Brotherhood member, while Hassan simply smiled and urged everyone to let the women enjoy themselves in peace.

Behind them, the sound of the women singing and ululating rose continuously. They persuaded my mother to join the gathering and dance; then, they also encouraged Umm Al-Abd and Umm Muhammad to dance. It was hard to understand how tears could flow amidst such overwhelming joy, but such are the conditions of the camp: every celebration reopens old wounds and brings back all the memories anew.

Chapter Twelve

My aunt's husband had completed his prison term and returned to his business activities and managing the family's lands. Their son, Abdel Rahim, was now toddling around, babbling his first words.

My aunt's husband resumed his visits to the same shops in Hebron where he had strong business relationships. They sat in the same gatherings, discussing anew around the fire, sipping tea, with the men inquiring about his prison experience, the treatment, the torture, and the interrogations. He spoke modestly, trying to downplay their fears of the occupier and prison, asserting that although it was indeed hard, it was bearable. It polished one's resolve, strengthened the spirit, and made a person realize their strength and greatness. The men shook their heads in disbelief and astonishment. Perhaps after he left, one would say to another, "See, he's lost his mind, brought trouble upon himself and his family, created a stir, and yet he says it's possible and bearable. What nonsense!"

His brother, Abdel Rahman, was in his third year of high school (Tawjihi) at Tariq Ibn Ziyad High School in Hebron. Known for his diligence, morality, religiosity, and his close relations with many of the city and surrounding villages' school youth. At that time, a group of devout students associated with the Islamic movement began to emerge at Tariq Ibn Ziyad High School. Several teachers at this school, who had graduated from the University of Jordan a while ago and had joined the Muslim Brotherhood during their studies there, began spreading Islamic thought in the city upon their return to Hebron and working in its schools, finding fertile ground among the high school students.

Simultaneously, the Sharia College was opened in the city, overseen by the city's mayor. The youth gathering at the college naturally formed political and ideological currents, with the Muslim Brotherhood's influence being the most prominent, thanks to the teachers in the college and the Islamic and Sharia studies offered.

A group of students began to crystallize around the idea of the Muslim Brotherhood. The name of the Muslim Brotherhood in the city of Hebron was not accompanied by the loud music that followed it when mentioned in the Gaza Strip or in the northern West Bank, where the name of the Brotherhood was almost like an insult or curse. However, in Hebron, the Brotherhood had an

ancient history. The idea of the Brotherhood was adopted by families known for their wealth and honor in the city, making it easy for the name to appear and be declared without embarrassment.

In Tariq Ibn Ziyad School, Abdel Rahman met with another group of city youth and youth from other villages. Influenced by university / Sharia College students and some teachers, they formed an open framework to study and adopt the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, embracing the study of Islam and contemporary Islamic thought.

One day, a group of these peers visited Abdel Rahman in the village of Surif as one of the Brotherhood's activities for acquaintance, bonding, and education. A group of about ten students, Abdel Rahman's friends, gathered on a hillside playing, talking about religion and politics. At Abdel Rahman's request, his aunt prepared lunch for them, where Abdel Rahman had slaughtered four chickens in the morning and she began preparing a meal of musakhan.

When Abdel Rahman's uncle returned from his shop and Abdel Rahman was late to fetch the food himself, he went to the land to deliver it to them. He greeted them, calling Abdel Rahman to inform him that he had brought their meal. Abdel Fattah thanked him, wondering why he bothered himself when he had intended to come and fetch it. Abdel Fattah explained there was no bother in it and that this was an opportunity to get to know the young men.

He sat with them during lunch, getting to know them and joining their fun, happiness, and discussions, trying to stir their nationalistic feelings, probing their opinions, ideas, and readiness. He inquired about their views on the current state of national work in the country. One of the youths replied that the problem is our people still lack the most important components of national work and resistance, hence the level of readiness and sacrifice remains low.

Abdel Fattah, surprised, asked how he could say that and what his claim was based on. The young man replied that a cause as significant and crucial as the Islamic cause, the issue of Al-Aqsa Mosque, the first Qibla, and the third holiest site, requires much sacrifice and martyrdom, and the level of national work is still far simpler than needed. The people's readiness is a million times less than required.

Abdel Fattah discussed again, saying, "But haven't you heard about the fedayeen operations in all the occupied areas in the Gaza Strip, in the north and centre of the West Bank, in Jerusalem, and Hebron, and the villages?" The young man

interrupted: "Yes, I have heard, but all of that is far less than what is needed!! Don't you see, man, how the Jews move freely in the city of Hebron without anyone confronting them except rarely, how tourists visit the sanctuary and Jews roam and frolic in the Ibrahimi Mosque, how they come to trade in Hebron, frequent its blacksmith and carpentry workshops, and our people and our families deal with them as if they are not an occupation and not occupiers and usurpers of our land and sanctities."

Abdel Rahman interrupted: "No doubt, national motivation alone is not capable of managing the conflict, and it is necessary..." Abdel Fattah interrupted him: "My brother, our people have defended their land throughout history and do not surrender, and they are..." The young man interrupted: "I will tell you a story that happened to me. After the Israeli occupation of Hebron, I was still young, and I saw a Jew walking alone in the street of Hebron, which annoyed me, so I picked up a stone from the ground and threw it at that Jew, then ran behind the apple trees in a piece of our land and sat there for a while until I believed the Jew had gone. Suddenly, I hear the voice of one of the neighbours calling 'Jamal, Jamal... come, he has gone.' When I emerged from behind the trees, the Jew was hiding behind the corner of the house, came towards me, and had drawn his pistol towards my head, trying to scare me so I would not repeat it. I understood that after I threw the stone at him, he had knocked on the neighbours' door and threatened them that if they did not bring me and hand me over to him, he would destroy their house and imprison their children. So, one of their sons did that role where he handed me over to the Jew in that manner."

Abdel Fattah interrupted: "These things happen, these things happen.. but the people are fine, and our nation is fine, and I say that our nation is fine, even those people are fine, they are good people, but they are poor and afraid for their interests, meaning their willingness to sacrifice is limited, and a long process must be done..." Abdel Fattah interrupted: "Man, no need for any process, duty compels everyone to do their part, but what do we have with this talk and why am I troubling your heads with my talks, I should let you continue your day."

And he stood up, shaking off his clothes, saying: "Welcome, young men, welcome," and stood up saying "Peace be upon you" while shaking off his clothes and left. The young men stood up, frolicking and joking among the olive trees.

My brother Mohammed and my cousin Ibrahim were greatly influenced by my brother Hassan and his religiosity, so they began to pray and gradually became committed to praying and attending the mosque with him. I was not like them; I

would sometimes pray and at other times neglect prayer, and sometimes accompany them to the mosque where we would perform the prayers in congregation.

Then, we would sometimes sit in one of those circles they held after the prayer, where one of them would talk about a religious topic, explain something from the Quran, elucidate a noble hadith, read from a book and explain what they read, or explain something from the Prophet's biography. Sometimes, after the Maghrib prayer, when I prayed with them in the mosque, they would sit in those circles and begin reciting prayers they call Al-Mathurat in a group voice. I did not memorize like them what they were reciting, so I would just move my lips along with them as if I knew what they were reading.

Mahmoud was very displeased with Mohammed and Ibrahim's religiosity, and he was previously upset by Hassan's religiosity. Often, he would sit with all of them together or with each one individually, trying to convince them to stop going to the mosque and participating in the activities there, warning them that those in charge are Ikhwanjis, meaning Muslim Brotherhood. He claimed that Sheikh Ahmad is an Ikhwanji and the Brotherhood are against Abdel Nasser and against Arab unity and do not recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization. They say that the martyrs of the Palestinian revolution are not really martyrs and do not participate in resistance and armed action. They would look at him, whether they were together or individually, surprised, saying, "What are you talking about? I go to the mosque, sit in the lectures, and listen to what is said, and there is nothing like what you are saying!" Mahmoud would reply, his voice raised and becoming more intense, "But I know them, they don't say this kind of talk to you now, now they talk to you about religion, Islam, the Prophet, and prayer, and then they will start on the hot topics." One of them would express his annoyance, saying, "Man, leave this talk, do you think we are little kids?"

In all the times I went to the mosque and sat in those lectures, I never heard anyone who spoke there touch on politics, mention Palestine or the resistance or the occupation, not even the history of the Palestinian cause, the Liberation Organization, Fatah, the martyrs, or anything else. They only talked about purely religious topics.

Whether discussions on those topics occurred in sessions I did not attend, I do not know. However, like all the youth in the camp during that period, I felt a great deal of respect and admiration for Abu Ammar Yasser Arafat, who had become a symbol of the Palestinian revolution. I considered him my leader and

commander, often raising his picture in demonstrations and chanting "With our souls, with our blood, we redeem you, Abu Ammar" with deep sincerity and seriousness from the bottom of our hearts.

However, I noticed that my brother Hassan was not like me or the other youth in the camp. I did not feel that he became as emotional or affected as us when Abu Ammar's name was mentioned, as if it was just any other name brought up in front of him, but I never heard him express an opposing or adversarial stance towards Arafat or the Palestine Liberation Organization.

When the topic of martyrs was raised, saying martyr so-and-so or so-and-so was martyred, he would sometimes declare that only God knows who is a martyr and who is not, as it is a matter connected to intentions and hearts. His candor would increase when it was mentioned that someone from the Popular Front had been martyred, saying, "And who knows if he is a martyr? He might originally not even believe in God or be an atheist, so how can he be a martyr then?" In such situations, Mahmoud would become furious and yell at him, "Who are you and all your sheikhs to decide who is a martyr and who is not, while you sit in your homes and issue fatwas on people who carry their souls in their hands and struggle for the nation?" Hassan would mutter some unclear words, stand up agitatedly, and leave the place. If Mohammed and Ibrahim were there, they would leave shortly after him, dispersing the gathering.

The discussion would become extremely heated if Abdel Hafiz was present in one of these sessions. He would start attacking the sheikhs and the religion, even going so far as to say that the Muslim Brotherhood are agents because they receive salaries from Saudi Arabia, along with different intellectual debates. Hassan would angrily respond with accusations of atheism and disbelief in God, and that they are tails of the Soviet Union, which was the first to recognize the state of Israel in 1948.

Much of Hassan's speech and dialogue appealed to me and resonated with my soul, but I did not understand his stance on several points. His weakness was apparent when they discussed the role of Islamists in bearing the national concern, their role in armed resistance against the occupation, and their stance on martyrs who die for the nation.

Also, their ambiguous stance towards the Palestine Liberation Organization was evident. Hassan, Mohammed, and Ibrahim felt their clear inability to convince others of their position because they themselves did not fully understand their

stance on these issues. It was as if they turned to Sheikh Ahmad and asked him about it, and he informed them that he would discuss these matters in the sessions he would hold at the mosque in the coming days.

Days later, I felt they wanted me to join them for the Maghrib prayer at the mosque, where those sessions usually took place between Maghrib and Isha prayers. So, I went with them. We prayed Maghrib behind Sheikh Hamed, who had grown old, and his voice could barely be heard. The mosque was packed with young men, men, and boys, unlike when I used to come with my grandfather, may Allah have mercy on him, when I was a child. After the prayer, some people left the mosque, then a large number of young men, about fifty, sat in a circle.

Sheikh Ahmad sat down and began his talk by praising Allah and sending blessings upon His Messenger, then he started discussing the role of humans on Earth and their servitude to Allah, giving a clear example with Rab'i ibn Amir's message to Rustum, the commander of the Persians before the Battle of Qadisiyyah. When Rustum asked him what brought them from the Arabian Peninsula to fight against them, he said: "We have come to bring out the servants from the worship of servants to the worship of the Lord of the servants, from the injustice of religions to the justice of Islam, and from the narrowness of this world to its expansiveness and the hereafter." He explained this in detail, stating that this understanding is difficult for people today from our nation to grasp in the context of our people's existence and our land under occupation. However, it is the only way for liberation and salvation, but people do not realize this, and they may even oppose it.

Just as the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca invited its people and the Arabs to Islam, where their dignity and greatness lie, and they did not realize it, opposing and fighting him. In the end, it was proven that the Arabs' dignity was in Islam, and that was what happened and what will be; our dignity is in our hands.

Then, he began discussing the definition of a martyr in Islam, stating that anyone who fights so that the word of Allah is supreme is in the path of Allah, and this is the legal definition of a martyr. As for what people conventionally consider a martyr, that is something else. He spoke at length about concepts related to the nature of the Islamic community representing Muslims, almost as if he was expressing reservations about the Palestine Liberation Organization being the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, but without stating it explicitly, only implying it.

Sheikh Hamed came and called for the Isha prayer. We stood up for the prayer, and Sheikh Hamed led us as the imam. During the prayer, he recited verses from the beginning of Surah Al-Isra and repeated some words or sentences from the verses as if he was continuing his lesson from before the prayer about the subject "servants of ours, mighty in strength." I realized that Sheikh was avoiding talking about the conflict with the occupation explicitly, trying to hint at it, fearing pursuit and harassment by the occupation authorities and preventing him from spreading his idea.

Hassan, Mohammed, and Ibrahim left the mosque satisfied, expressing their contentment and admiration for Sheikh Ahmad's speech during our way back home. I didn't understand what pleased them about it, although the Sheikh's words were beautiful and impactful, but it didn't provide clear answers to the questions raised by Mahmoud and Abdul Hafiz in their discussions with Hassan.

The standard of living in the camp had begun to noticeably improve. Most households now had one or two members working in Israel, earning a decent income compared to the old conditions in the sector or in Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. People's conditions were clearly improving; you could find radios in all the homes and many had televisions. Many households subscribed to the electricity network, lighting up their homes, some had refrigerators or gas stoves, and most homes were connected to the water network. In our home, we had a good radio and subscribed to both electricity and water networks, but we were not yet lucky enough to have a television, refrigerator, or gas oven. Despite this, our situation was much better than many families who remained in a state of hardship.

What's important is that in the past two decades since the migration after the Nakba (1948), the population of the camps had astonishingly doubled. The houses could no longer accommodate their inhabitants, especially since many who were children at the time or even born after the Nakba had now become men, married, and had sons and daughters. Each house had one or more married brothers, turning the already overcrowded camp houses into something resembling chicken coops.

At this time, discussions began about housing projects prepared by the Housing Department in the military government. Those wishing to expand in the camp house could register their name in Housing, pay nominal fees, provided they demolish their camp house, and thus, each married individual in this house would be granted a residential room in the neighbourhoods to be established.

This opened up a heated debate among the camp residents. There wasn't a gathering, meeting, or visit where this issue wasn't brought up, dividing people into opponents and supporters. Supporters argued for adapting to reality, stating that living in societies like "sardine cans" indefinitely isn't feasible. Houses can't accommodate us with the significant population increase, and the solution to the issue isn't visible on the horizon. Nor can we afford to buy regular land and build on it due to the prohibitive cost. Opponents feared that emptying the camps of their residents would dilute the refugee issue, believing this to be the occupier's goal: to settle refugees in these neighbourhoods and end their cause. The debate continued, and these projects remained just an idea that hadn't yet been implemented, leaving neither side's opinion proven right or wrong.

Before my brothers Mahmoud and Hassan got married, I didn't know there was something called cosmetics. My mother, like other women in the camp, never used such products. All they did for special occasions was uncover their hair, lighten their eyebrows, and yet, they appeared extremely beautiful. Who would seek cosmetics when struggling to feed their children, who only tasted meat on significant occasions or couldn't distinguish between fruit names and types they only saw in school biology books' pictures?

When one of the girls got married, it was apparent that some makeup was used for their beautification, but I didn't realize there was something specifically known as cosmetics. However, after Mahmoud and Hassan's weddings, whenever I entered one of their rooms, I saw bottles and boxes on the dressers - wardrobes with a large mirror in the middle, placed in bedrooms - understood to be cosmetics. Yet, it seemed they weren't used beyond the wedding day and relatives' marriage occasions. Until this point, we hadn't seen any woman walking in the camp streets adorned with makeup.

Indeed, many women did not cover their heads, some did, but cosmetics were neither well-known nor widespread even as there was a clear improvement in people's overall economic situation... We didn't feel a significant change in this aspect, but undoubtedly, some women had begun using cosmetics, though it remained limited.

Camp girls were natural, without cosmetics or even the simplest beauty treatments like hair removal or eyebrow thinning. Yet, they often shone like full moons, their beauty enhanced by the pinnacle of modesty. When asked a question, their eyes would stay grounded, and if their gaze accidentally met a boy's, they would immediately lower it, their cheeks flushing with blood, adding to their beauty.

"Khalil," a neighbour's son, began to develop feelings for one of the camp girls after their eyes met once. He felt he loved her and sensed she reciprocated his feelings. He would always wait for her to leave for school and return home, never daring to approach her or exchange even a word. He was content with their eyes meeting from a distance, understanding this as her sharing his feelings, and would hold onto this until he could propose to her parents after finishing his studies and finding a job, gathering enough to cover the costs of building a house and getting married.

Some young men corresponded with girls they loved, and some of these girls responded to their letters. Yet, the majority of camp youths adhered strictly to the rules against such interactions, following the strict guidance of our mother and her noble upbringing, staying far from these matters. However, it seems some youths dared to delve deeper into this area, treating it casually.

Once, returning from the beach, I turned at the corner of our house and saw Ibrahim, my cousin, coming back from the mosque. A girl from the neighbourhood, known for being playful, was sitting by her house's door. Seeing Ibrahim walking shyly, his gaze downward as instructed by the mosque sheikhs and our mother's constant advice, she looked at him with a playful voice and said, "Oh, it's the great sheikh, bless you! Please, grace us with a glance, you who only look upwards, never down." I saw Ibrahim's face turn red with embarrassment and shyness, his pace quickening as if escaping a long-term capture, leaving her words hanging embarrassingly in the air. I threatened to expose her to his mother (my aunt) if she tried to tease or wander around me again.

The victory of 1973, although it did not practically alleviate our situation as Palestinians, marked a strategic turning point in all our feelings. True, we did not see Israel disappear and leave Palestine, nor did we return to our towns, cities, and villages from which our people were displaced in 1948. Even the territories occupied in 1967 in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan, and Sinai were not liberated. What actually happened was the advancement of the Egyptian army, crossing the Suez Canal and breaching the Bar-Lev Line. Yet, we were fully satisfied and gratified by Israel's defeat...

That's how we understood things back then, and we believed with all our minds and hearts that the myth of Israel and its invincible army had collapsed before the grandeur and will of the Arab soldier, whether on the Egyptian or Syrian front. Our heads were almost touching the skies with pride and dignity.

However, our feelings gradually started to change upon hearing the new tone from the Egyptian President Sadat about his readiness for peace with Israel. Our shock was profound when we heard him announce his willingness to visit the Israeli Knesset. The catastrophe completely silenced us as we listened to the radio covering Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and his speech in the Knesset before the Israeli government and Knesset members. We didn't have a TV at home, so we didn't see those images, but the radio coverage was enough to deeply shock us, making us question whether this was reality or just fantasy. It seemed the entire Arab world, or most of it, was shocked, given the level of contradictions and disputes that occurred between regimes, which were serious and far-reaching. Naturally, as Palestinians, we leaned entirely towards the opposing, antagonistic, and aggressive voices against Sadat and against the Camp David Accords. We preferred listening to opposition stations, especially those broadcasting from Baghdad.

The most significant event for our family was that Egyptian universities closed their doors to Palestinian students, against the backdrop of the profound disagreements between Sadat and the PLO, which was strongly opposed to peace with Israel. This opposition was known, clear, and explicit, culminating in some Palestinians assassinating the well-known journalist Al-Sabai over this issue. Consequently, a political decision was made in Egypt to scale back relations with Palestinians, including not accepting graduates of the Palestinian high school certificate from the Gaza Strip into Egyptian universities as before.

My brother Mohammed finished his high school this year and was supposed to be accepted into Egyptian universities. Our economic situation at the time was most suitable for that (there). Standing at a crossroads, Mohammed ultimately decided to study at Birzeit University in the West Bank, near Ramallah. He traveled there, applied to the university, and was accepted into the College of Science. He began attending from the start of the new academic year, sharing an apartment with other students in Ramallah and living there. Mohammed would return home once a month, staying with us for a few days before heading back to Ramallah.

The Fidai (guerrilla) activities continued in the occupied territories and inside the lands occupied in 1948 but had significantly decreased. Much of the national effort began to take the form of political, trade union, and mass work. The Israeli authorities allowed municipal elections in the West Bank, and political frameworks in various areas formed to participate in the elections.

In Hebron, representatives of the Fatah movement, led by Fahd Al-Qawasmi, allied with the Muslim Brotherhood and others against Sheikh Jabari, who had been the mayor since the Jordanian rule in the West Bank and during the Israeli occupation period. Sheikh "Al-Ja'bari" withdrew when he found his chances of winning were slim, allowing the Fatah/Brotherhood coalition to win and form a city council of mixed ideological and political composition. National representatives and well-known national figures like "Bassam Shak'a" in Nablus also won in other West Bank cities. At the same time, many professional unions such as the engineers, medical, and lawyers' associations were formed in various West Bank cities, where periodic elections were held to choose their administrative bodies. The competition was mainly between the leftist forces and Fatah, and then the Islamic current began to emerge, often allying with Fatah against the left before starting to run independently in some locations. Similarly, university activities began to mirror this dynamic at Al-Najah National University in Nablus, Birzeit University near Ramallah, and Hebron University, which evolved from the College of Sharia in the city.

During this time, in the late 1970s, after the closure of Egyptian universities to students from the Gaza Strip, a group of notable figures from Gaza decided to open a university in the Strip. They began working to mitigate this by contacting the Israeli authorities, who did not approve the opening of a university.

It wasn't difficult to agree on that; a university was opened in the Al-Azhar religious high school in Gaza during the evening as an extension of the institute. It gradually expanded and transformed into a university, even though it never received recognition from the occupation authorities. Instead, it faced constant blockade and harassment.

Those figures continued their contacts with the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization abroad to receive support for opening the university, and with some well-known figures in Palestine and abroad to mobilize financial support for the university in Arab countries. With the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel coming into effect, Israel began attempts to beautify its image in the territories occupied in 1967 as a preparation for the autonomy included in the Camp David Accords. It established what is called the Civil Administration, which was supposed to take over the management of the areas from the military command as a preparatory stage for the autonomy to be established later.

The Civil Administration was just a new name for military rule, and the changes were not significantly distinctive. However, it opened the space for some controlled political expressions, as previously mentioned.

During this period, Islamists became active and applied to open institutions and associations according to the Ottoman law, and they were allowed to do so. This includes Islamic associations, Muslim Youth associations, Islamic Society, charitable societies, clubs, kindergartens, and medical clinics through which they began to offer services to the residents and spread the Islamist ideology.

My sister Tihani graduated from the teacher's institute during this period and after some time got employed at a UNRWA primary school in the camp as a teacher. After a while, one of the decent young men proposed to her, and she got married, finding happiness and contentment in her marriage.

Chapter Thirteen

The academic year concluded, and students of Tariq Ibn Ziyad School in Hebron sat for their final exams. Upon receiving their results, high school graduates began exploring their future prospects. Some planned to study at the College of Sharia / Hebron University, others sought opportunities in Saudi universities, and some looked towards Jordanian universities. My aunt's husband still harbored dreams of studying at the University of Jordan but realized that time had passed him by and his responsibilities had grown too large to allow for a return to full-time education. However, upon his brother Abd al-Rahman's high school graduation, he saw a chance to vicariously fulfill his dream.

He discussed the idea of studying at the University of Jordan, which Abd al-Rahman accepted, aligning with his own desire to study at the College of Sharia. This plan also matched the aspirations of his friend Jamal, whom he had met and conversed with on the slopes of the hill in the village of Surif.

Indeed, both were accepted into the College of Sharia at the University of Jordan. Before the academic year started, they traveled to Amman and, along with other students, rented an apartment in the Al-Muhajirin neighbourhood, a populous area with a number of Palestinian residents. The university presented an entirely new world, vastly different from the environments Abd al-Rahman had known in Surif, Jamal in Hebron, or what they experienced together at Tariq Ibn Ziyad School.

The intellectual life, political struggles, social openness, and the level and influence of active individuals in the student life were all markedly distinct from their previous experiences. In the College of Sharia, where they studied, the adherence to the hijab by female students was exemplary. However, university life, in general, was considerably more liberal compared to the conservative society of Hebron and, particularly, the surrounding villages like Surif.

But Abd al-Rahman and Jamal had already decisively determined the direction of their lives, fully committing to the Islamic movement and embracing the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood during their years at Tariq Ibn Ziyad School in Hebron.

At the College of Sharia at the University of Jordan in Amman, they encountered several Brotherhood figures among the faculty, PhD holders in Sharia. Here, Jamal and his colleague met experienced individuals in advocacy, public engagement, and encountered figures who far surpassed their own aspirations, plunging into student activism and the ideological and political struggles within the university's halls and courtyards.

Following the university's decision to abolish student unions, student engagement in activities reached its peak regardless. Students found an outlet in the elections held for what were called associations, and Jamal, running for the Revival of Heritage Association within the College of Sharia, won as part of the Islamic movement associated with the Brotherhood. The association began to manage aspects of student activities, particularly in cultural and educational fields, by organizing trips to historical sites or arranging pilgrimages to Mecca for Hajj and Umrah. One of the association members suggested staging the play "A Scholar and a Tyrant" by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. The association embraced the idea, allocating a budget and hiring a TV director, leading to successful performances that impressed many faculty members with its high quality.

This period coincided with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which had significant repercussions on student activities at the university. The Islamists highlighted the situation, viewing the Afghan revolution and mujahideen as a cause they inherently supported, seeing themselves as an extension of that struggle. Discussions among the Islamic youth about the necessity to travel to Afghanistan to support the mujahideen became frequent. The Revival of Heritage Association even donated five thousand dinars from the proceeds of the play "A Scholar and a Tyrant," which amounted to around fifteen thousand dinars, towards the cause in Afghanistan.

The Jewish settlement activity intensified across the West Bank, with lands being confiscated, new settlements emerging, and settlers treating the land as their own. This situation provoked the residents and prompted the National Guidance Committee to start campaigns of demonstrations, marches, and media work against the settlements.

The situation escalated with increasing stone-throwing and Molotov cocktail attacks, especially in camps like Deheisheh near Bethlehem, a hub for settler movement between Jerusalem and Hebron. Against this backdrop, a secret extremist Jewish settler group began planning assassinations of prominent national figures from the Guidance Committee, aided by civil administration

explosives experts. They succeeded in gathering information and planting bombs in vehicles or garages, causing injuries when detonated, while the occupying forces pretended to discover and defuse the remaining devices. These events fueled unrest in the occupied territories, significantly raising the level of popular activities but also noticeably diminishing armed resistance efforts. Birzeit University near Ramallah stood out as a focal point for national activism during these times.

Amidst this atmosphere, my brother Mohammed arrived in Ramallah to start his new life at Birzeit University's College of Science. This world was entirely different from the conservative, enclosed environment of the camp and Gaza Strip in general. At Birzeit University, it was rare to see a woman covering her head, and the openness and interactions between genders were akin to Western societies. For Mohammed, integrating into this new lifestyle was almost impossible due to his upbringing, the path he chose for himself, and the religious principles he committed to, making life in such a place seem nearly impossible.

Dealing with the clashes with the occupation forces during the sporadic demonstrations triggered by developments in the Palestinian scene was not difficult for someone who grew up in the Al-Shati camp and experienced the armed resistance in the Gaza Strip, finding these events relatively simple and manageable by comparison.

All accommodations in the town of Birzeit were taken by senior students, leaving no room for him, so he and a group of young men had to rent in Ramallah. This necessitated daily travel from Ramallah to Birzeit, a journey that was not long and relatively inexpensive but forced students to spend their entire day away from their study rooms and comforts while waiting for subsequent lectures.

In this shared accommodation, Mohammed discovered numerous contradictions and unsuitable situations as he was the only one among the six young men who was religiously committed. One of them openly declared his Marxist beliefs, a prominent trend at the university, leading to frequent mocking of Mohammed's devotion and faith, often causing tension and estrangement within the house.

Another roommate was entirely uninterested in academics, focusing instead on discussing women, their relationships, and his alleged conquests. He would spend hours writing love letters to several women simultaneously, then read them aloud, oblivious to his countless errors and indifferent to those studying around him who pleaded for quiet.

Financially, Mohammed's situation had significantly improved, allowing him to manage his expenses without issue. He tried to save as much as possible to contribute to his household, but often found himself dining at the university's cafeteria on days when he had to stay for almost the entire day waiting for classes.

In those days, Mohammed faced the challenge of performing his prayers, especially Dhuhr, Asr, and sometimes even Maghrib, as there was no mosque within the university. He would find a secluded spot outside the university building, near an olive tree, to pray. However, he soon discovered that there was a mosque in the town, even though the majority of its residents were Christians. He began to frequent the mosque for his prayers whenever his schedule allowed. Surprisingly, he met dozens of fellow university students at the mosque who were also committed to their Islamic practices.

This group of devout and faithful youths found a high level of harmony and cohesion in an environment that was entirely hostile to any form of religious observance. When Mohammed returned to Ramallah after his classes, he would sometimes wander the city's quiet streets at night, following the sound of the Maghrib or Isha call to prayer to the nearby mosque where he would perform the prayer.

Repeatedly attending Isha and occasionally Maghrib prayers, as well as the Friday prayers, allowed Mohammed to become acquainted with several Islamic students and young Muslims in the area. They began to form the nucleus of the Islamic bloc at Birzeit University, gathering around each other, praying together at the nearby mosque, and sitting at the same table in the university cafeteria to discuss their studies, university affairs, and Islamic activities.

Other groups formed nuclei for different movements, such as Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, each planning their activities to attract unaffiliated students and gain their support in upcoming elections. The university's political and social landscape was thus divided among various student groups, each with its own agendas and strategies for recruitment and influence.

A significant portion of Birzeit University's student body was female, presenting unique challenges and opportunities for student organizations. While leftist groups faced no barriers in engaging with female students, the Islamic bloc encountered significant hurdles due to cultural and religious considerations in working with female students, reflecting the diverse and complex social dynamics within the university.

Some female students leaned towards Islamic ideologies, supporting the Islamic bloc, yet they were not active participants. Everyone in the bloc, including Mohammed, who came from the Al-Shati' refugee camp and was raised on strict rules repeatedly emphasized by his mother, agreed on the necessity of initiating communication with these women to invite them to join or support the bloc. However, Mohammed, faced with a simple academic query from a female classmate, would become visibly uncomfortable, responding briefly before quickly retreating.

As election preparations heated up, debates and discussions flourished across the university, touching on the history, current state, and future of the Palestinian cause, as well as the roles and criticisms of various factions. The campus was alive with posters, slogans, and banners as everyone aimed to secure the best outcomes. Eventually, the left-wing groups emerged with the highest results, narrowly outpacing Fatah, but it was the Islamic bloc that achieved surprisingly strong results, despite being the smallest group.

Mohammed made it a habit to return to the camp in Al-Shati' roughly every month, spending the weekend with his family before heading back to Ramallah to continue his studies and student activism. Meanwhile, Jamal and Abdur-Rahman completed their final exams at the Jordan University's Sharia College and promptly returned to the West Bank, not waiting for the results. Jamal's mother eagerly awaited his return, hoping to see him settle down with a suitable partner. However, Jamal aspired to pursue a master's degree in Pakistan, where he could also express solidarity with the Afghan cause, even if only symbolically, by being in a neighbouring country.

Under his mother's persistent encouragement, Jamal began to see the idea of marriage as increasingly acceptable, reasoning that marrying did not conflict with his ambitions. During a visit to the university to collect his diploma, surrounded by graduates, Jamal allowed himself to scan the crowd for a potential future wife. He noticed a young woman, radiating grace and modesty in her Islamic attire, seemingly perfect until a small child approached her, leading him to mistakenly assume she was married.

However, a woman soon approached Jamal, identifying herself as Intisar, his college peer. She mentioned a familial proposal for marriage to Jamal, expressing her preference for him over another suitor due to her desire for a religious partner. Despite the initial confusion, Jamal felt an immediate connection but

later discovered Intisar did not possess a West Bank ID, complicating potential residency if they married in the West Bank.

Denied a travel permit to Pakistan by Jordanian security due to his association with the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamal decided to settle in Hebron and start working. Through a colleague, he was introduced to another university graduate from the Faculty of Science, whose personality and family impressed his mother. Plans were made to formally meet her family, marking the beginning of a new Chapter in Jamal's life.

Upon entering the room, weighed down by immense shyness, Jamal found himself unable to maintain eye contact, focusing instead on the floor. Seated, he attempted to initiate conversation when unexpectedly, another young woman, whom he had previously mistaken for his potential bride, engaged in conversation, trying to break the ice. Divine destiny seemed to play its part, aligning their paths as potential life partners.

Many Islamic scholars, upon graduating, typically found employment within the Islamic Charitable Society in Hebron, which boasted numerous educational, developmental, and social institutions. Jamal secured a position at the Secondary School affiliated with the University Graduates League, which, though subtly connected to the Palestine Liberation Organization, engaged him in teaching Islamic Culture to senior students.

Working in an environment filled with diverse political and ideological perspectives served as a political forum for Jamal, challenging him to defend his views amid debates on the Palestinian resistance's historical decisions, such as their departure from Jordan and the absence of the Muslim Brotherhood's participation in political upheavals.

In the alleys of Jabalia Camp in Gaza, a young man's suspicious attire drew attention. A failed attempt to attack an approaching military jeep with a grenade, which surprisingly didn't detonate, highlighted the ongoing risks and concerns faced by factions within the Palestinian resistance, particularly Fatah. This incident underscored the complexities and dangers inherent in the struggle against occupation, reflecting the broader tensions and debates within the Palestinian political landscape.

During a gathering at Mahmoud's place, the conversation veered towards the concerns some had regarding the ineffectiveness of weapons supplied to resistance groups. Mahmoud questioned if the flawed armaments indicated a

deliberate attempt to undermine the resistance efforts. Could this be a tactic by the Israeli intelligence agency, Shin Bet, to provide these groups with defective weapons? There was a consensus among those present that a thorough investigation was necessary to uncover the truth. They agreed on the need to reach out to anyone connected to the issue, especially those youths who had been detained, to gather more information and insights into the matter. This approach aimed to clarify whether there was an external manipulation at play, potentially orchestrated by Israeli intelligence, to weaken the Palestinian resistance by sabotaging their armament.

Chapter Fourteen

The Lebanese civil war, erupting in full force and drawing in the Palestinians as both significant participants and victims, had a profound impact back in the Occupied Territories. Virtually every Palestinian family was somehow affected by the conflict due to the widespread dispersion of Palestinians across different regions following the catastrophes of 1948 and 1967. This dispersion meant that families were often split across various refugee camps and countries, with some members finding themselves in Lebanon amidst the turmoil. While my family didn't have direct relatives in Lebanon at the time, many of our neighbours did, living in a constant state of anxiety and worry as they followed news updates and desperately sought any information about their loved ones.

Communication challenges and the logistical complications of traveling to Lebanon only added to the distress. The story of a neighbour whose sons had joined the revolution in Lebanon illustrates the personal toll of the conflict. Her mental and physical health deteriorated drastically due to the constant worry and lack of news, eventually leading to her death without ever learning the fate of her sons. This tragic outcome highlights the deep psychological scars borne by families with members involved in the conflict.

As the civil war dragged on, my cousin Ibrahim faced a pivotal decision regarding his future education. He had the option of attending a university in the West Bank, like Al-Najah or Birzeit, or enrolling in the newly established Islamic University in Gaza, which was just starting with around twenty students. This decision point underscores the broader choices and dilemmas faced by Palestinian youth during a period marked by both internal strife and ongoing resistance against the Israeli occupation.

In this year, there was talk of accepting only a handful of students and about the inauguration of a Faculty of Arabic Language in addition to the Faculties of Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion. The prospects for this nascent university were not clear, and any sensible person at the time would have predicted its certain failure, given it had no buildings of its own; its students were studying in the building of Al-Azhar Secondary School in the afternoon. It lacked an academic faculty, relying instead on a number of Al-Azhar School's sheikhs for teaching, with no significant budgets or any of the basic components of a university.

Immediately after Ibrahim completed his studies and the examination results revealed his outstanding achievement, scoring 91% in the science stream, my mother spoke with my brother Mahmoud about Ibrahim's university education and suggested that he study with Muhammad at Birzeit University. That evening, when we were all gathered at home, Muhammad called Ibrahim to his room and asked him to go to Ramallah in the coming days and enroll at Birzeit University. Ibrahim hesitated about registering at Birzeit, which made Mahmoud concerned and doubtful about ambitions our financial capabilities could not bear. "Then where do you want to study?" Ibrahim, uncertain, answered, "I might enroll in the Islamic University." Mahmoud asked in surprise and astonishment, "The Islamic University?! Do you mean the university they opened in Al-Azhar?" Ibrahim responded, "Possibly, possibly..."

My mother entered the room, having overheard the conversation, and said, "What happened to you, Ibrahim? It's like you don't want to study at Birzeit fearing the costs. My son, you and your cousins are like brothers; what's sufficient for one is sufficient for two, and our provision is from God. Our situation is good, thank God." It was clear that my mother understood what was deep in Ibrahim's heart, but he tried to hide it, his eyes welling up with tears, "God bless you, my aunt, but I don't want to leave Gaza."

Mahmoud pulled out a sum of Jordanian currency from his pocket and handed it to Ibrahim, saying, "This is for the first semester's fees, registration, travel expenses, and a bit extra for outings. Let's go and register at Birzeit." Ibrahim refused to take it and pushed Mahmoud's hand back, but my mother yelled at him, "Take it now, think at your leisure, and register wherever you want. We want you to register at Birzeit with Muhammad, but you are free, and the final decision is yours... Take it." Ibrahim reached out his hand, took the money while looking down, and it seemed he had already decided to enroll in the Islamic University since any calculation confirmed it would cost half as much as studying at Birzeit or elsewhere.

He did not want to burden the family any further, and being in Gaza allowed him to work occasionally to earn some money that could alleviate the financial burden on the family. Indeed, he went to the Al-Azhar school building, where he registered for study at the Islamic University and was accepted into the Arabic language faculty.

When he returned with the news, he first told me and took out the remaining amount of money from his pocket to give it to me to return it to my mother

because he was embarrassed by her, but I refused to take it from him, saying, "What do I have to do with this, and why should I get involved between you and the government? Go to her yourself and deal with the matter." He said, "Come on," and I led the way to the kitchen where my mother was preparing food, telling her, "Congratulate Ibrahim; he has been accepted into the Islamic University, Faculty of Arabic Language." My mother turned to him, and before she could utter a word, he said, "God bless you, here's the excess money." My mother's eyes filled with pride and appreciation, she took the money from him and then gave him back five dinars, saying, "Spend it or save it, you need it now." He tried to refuse, but she insisted he take it, he took it with a shyness almost overwhelming him, repeating, "God keep you for us, my aunt, God bless you."

At that time, the Islamic University was no more than an ambition and a few students who were forced to study there due to a lack of other opportunities. It was located in the building of the Al-Azhar Religious Institute on Thalathini Street in Gaza, which after the morning study period ended for the institute's students and they went home, was used by about twenty Islamic University students who had completed their first year in the Faculties of Sharia and Fundamentals of Religion, and a limited number of new students in the Faculties of Sharia, Fundamentals of Religion, and Arabic Language.

Each group entered one of the institute's classrooms, and one of the institute's sheikhs would come in to teach them a subject from their specialty. The first sheikh would leave, and a second sheikh would enter, and so forth, through four or five consecutive lectures, exactly like in high school, without any significant change.

Into this educational atmosphere, Ibrahim entered without feeling that there was a university or university life like what he had heard from Mahmoud about university life in Egypt or what he had heard from Muhammad about life in Birzeit. However, he realized that he had no right to impose even a single penny of burden on the family, and his own pride prevented him from choosing any other path.

At the same time, he was capable of returning to work at the vegetable stall in the market, especially since his university studies were in the evening, allowing him to work efficiently in the morning. However, he realized that if he even mentioned this idea in front of my mother and Mahmoud, it would cause a commotion, so he began to think of another way to work and earn money without upsetting my mother or stirring Mahmoud's emotions.

One of his friends from the mosque, who worked in construction and refused to work within the territories occupied in 1948, settling for work within the Sector despite the low wages and scarcity of work, agreed that Ibrahim could work with him as an assistant until noon, which was acceptable to him. Ibrahim returned and presented the matter to us as wanting to learn the construction trade with his friend, not as a means to earn a living, and the family had no objections based on how Ibrahim presented it.

On the days when they found work in one of the houses, he would leave early in the morning dressed in work clothes. If the job was nearby, he would return after work to change his clothes and go to the university. If the job was far, he would take his clothes and books with him, changing into his clothes around noon if circumstances allowed, or go to the university in his work clothes, where he would change there. Sometimes, he had to attend lectures in his work clothes. Often, they worked on Fridays, cutting work short to go to the mosque for Friday prayers, then returning to complete their work in the afternoon. He was satisfied that Ibrahim began to cover his own expenses and needs, and eventually bought a bicycle to ease his movement between home, work, and university, saving him both effort and money.

The standard of living in the occupied territories began to noticeably improve, as political and intellectual blocs in various professional unions became more prominent. In the Engineers Association, the three main directions formed prominent blocs: the Fatah movement, the left-wing, and the Islamists. My brother Mahmoud was among the active Fatah members in the association, coordinating with his colleagues to win the largest number of votes from engineers in an attempt to win the elections for the association's administrative body, just like their counterparts from the other two directions, as well as in the Medical Association and the Bar Association.

The competition in these associations and unions was fierce, with each faction forming teams of activists who began visiting their colleagues in their homes and workplaces in an attempt to convince them to participate in the elections and to vote for them specifically. Sometimes, two forces would ally against the third to wrest control from it. Since the leftists were earlier in union work and better at organizing themselves, Fatah often allied with the Islamists to work on overcoming the leftists.

The most notable instance was in the elections for the Gaza Red Crescent Society, where the left was strong and established. This compelled Fatah and the

Islamists to form an alliance in an attempt to win and defeat the leftists, leading to clashes mobilized significantly by the Islamists at the Islamic University in the Gaza Strip, which had seen notable growth recently.

My brother Mahmoud contributed his efforts in the Engineers Association elections from Fatah, planning to secure the largest number of engineers to win the elections. They had meetings every two or three days, sitting down to review the names of the engineers, the outcomes of contacts with them, and assess the work of opposing forces. They then launched into action for more decisive efforts until the election day arrived, when they deployed several of their cars to transport some hesitant engineers to come, as well as in the Medical Association and the Engineers Union, among other professional unions.

It was clear that the Islamists were focusing their efforts especially on university students and generally on high school students across all the occupied territories in the West Bank through cultural, sports, and social youth activities aimed at gathering and ideologically and intellectually mobilizing the youth.

Sheikh Ahmad personally oversaw student activities in Gaza. He would invite a number of active students from the Islamic University to learn about the students' conditions and ask them to attend once a week. They, in turn, invited other youths close to them to come and discuss the work of Islamic activity in the university, preparation for the elections, how to work with ordinary young people, approaches to drawing closer to them, and winning them over for the Islamists.

After the elections were completed and victory was achieved, he directed them to work in high schools to prepare the atmosphere among students who would either go to the Islamic University or other universities, making them ready to join under the banner of the Islamic blocks and bear the burdens of Islamic work.

Ibrahim was one of the activists at the university during that time, and Sheikh Ahmad relied heavily on him and a number of other students. He was one of the Islamic block's candidates for the Student Union elections, who won. He was always busy with his work to earn some money in the morning, then studying in the afternoon, and engaging in his Islamic activities in the evening. Ibrahim was a model of dynamism and activity. When night fell and he returned home, he would have his dinner, then sit down to read his textbooks or other books, and hardly ever slept normally. He would often fall asleep with the book on his chest, so I would take the book from him, place it beside him, cover him up, and my

respect and appreciation for him grew... And my determination and engagement with my studies increased in my third year of high school.

Mohammed was making excellent progress in his studies at the College of Sciences at Birzeit University. The accommodation in Ramallah was not suitable, so he made sure to arrange for new accommodation in Birzeit itself. With difficulty, he found that accommodation with a group of young men from the Islamic block. In the same house, under one of the luxurious homes from the other rear side of the street, were three rooms where Mohammed lived with five of his colleagues.

This house was completely different from the one he had lived in Ramallah, as all of Mohammed's housemates were devout young men from the Islamic block. The house had turned into a semi-headquarters for the block and its activities, frequented by the majority of the block's activists and used for their meetings, and planning their student work at the university.

Mohammed played a significant role in leading the work, which made him, despite himself, obliged to coordinate with the female students supporting the block. Some of the female students began wearing the hijab, marking a near-strategic shift in Birzeit University to see some veiled female students. He would always invite them in groups, so two or three would come, and they would stand talking in one of the university's corridors or sit in the cafeteria, lowering their gaze without looking up at them, and the women would do the same, lowering their gaze without looking up at the men. He would direct them to arrange work with the female students and explain to them their role in the work at the university.

Student activism in universities was not confined within the framework of a single university, and this was the level of all student orientations and frameworks. Each student bloc in one university attempted to connect with its counterpart in other universities and institutes spontaneously. Students of the Fatah movement in Birzeit would contact their peers in Al-Najah University and others. Similarly, for the Islamic bloc students, it was common to find a delegation from Al-Najah University visiting their counterparts in Birzeit University and vice versa. They exchanged experiences or advice and coordinated joint activities. Despite the infancy and limited student activism of the Islamic University, it took its role in that activity, and Muhammad and Ibrahim often met in some of the joint activities that were organized. Activists from Birzeit University frequently visited Al-Najah National University in Nablus. There, the level of openness was less than in

Birzeit University but increased tens of times compared to the exceptionally conservative city of Gaza, even before the spread of Islamic activity. This was perhaps one of the factors for the significant spread of it in the sector, surpassing other areas. Hebron University was in its hierarchy between Nablus and Gaza; it was less conservative than Gaza and stricter than Al-Najah University. The movement of these students was far from any clear surveillance or harassment by the occupation's intelligence agencies, and if there was any surveillance, it was not apparent. Thus, these students moved freely and carried out their activities without any restrictions, especially since they were usually confined to the realms of ideological conflicts and internal competition among different frameworks and orientations, which did not have a clear impact on the occupation. On national occasions or when special incidents occurred, and if the occupation forces had information or suspicions that events would take place in the universities, they would prevent students from reaching them by placing barriers on the roads, turning back students, or surrounding the universities with large forces and preventing students from leaving them, transferring their disturbances and activities to nearby areas. Sometimes there were confrontations between the students and soldiers. The students would throw stones, chant national slogans and chants, and the soldiers would fire tear gas or bullets over their heads, and sometimes at the legs, followed by some raids and arrests of some students, who were detained for a while; some were imprisoned for not too long periods, and then life continued as usual. In Carmel High School, where I study, the Islamic bloc students, supervised by my cousin Ibrahim, organized a trip to Jerusalem and some other tourist areas within Palestine, and began registering those interested by paying the trip fees. One of the activists approached me to participate in the trip. I hesitated and promised to consider the matter and get back to him later. At home, Ibrahim talked to me about registering for the trip and not missing out on it, saying it would be a loss to miss this opportunity to leave the sector for the West Bank, Jerusalem, and inside the 1948 occupied territories to get to know our country. He asked if I had any issues with the trip fees, he could pay for me. I smiled and explained that my financial situation allowed me to afford it, and the issue was not the fees but the principle of participating in such trips. He pressed me to participate, so I promised him I would. The next day, I registered for the trip, paid the fees to the bloc's representative at the school, and we prepared to leave early on Friday morning. We gathered at the school's gate, each carrying a bag with food for the two days, knowing Ibrahim would join us as the real supervisor of the trip. On the bus, he

recited the travel prayer, and we repeated after him, "In the name of Allah, it moves and anchors. Praise be to Allah who has subjected this to us, and we could not have done it by ourselves. And indeed, to our Lord, we will return. Allah, we ask You in this journey for righteousness and piety, and for works that You are pleased with." As we passed sites or remnants of Palestinian villages or towns destroyed in the war or by the Jews to erase all traces of Arab presence, Ibrahim or another young man with him would stop and explain, "This is so-and-so, these are the remnants of the city of Ashkelon, this sycamore tree stands at the centre of Hamama village, here are the remains of the mosque of Asdud Park, and there are remnants of its school and some of its houses." Our first stop was on a beautiful hill with one of the Christian monasteries. We got off there, and Ibrahim began explaining about this place now called (Latrun Monastery), stating that this was the site of the Battle of Ajnadayn led by Abu Ubaidah Amer bin Al-Jarah" who led the Muslim army to conquer Palestine.

Ibrahim bent down as he described some details of the battle and the large number of companions who were martyred in it. He grabbed a handful of its soil, which tended towards a reddish hue, and said, "This soil bears witness that it is mixed with the blood of the Prophet's companions, peace be upon him." Tears welled up in his eyes, and a profound silence enveloped the attendees, broken only by a bird's chirp or the rustle of leaves shaken by the wind. Then he said, "This soil is our soil, and this land is our land, kneaded by the companions of the Prophet with their pure blood, and it must be kneaded again with pure, sanctified blood from the followers of the Prophet, peace be upon him, until it is liberated anew." I was stunned by what I heard, especially coming from Ibrahim, who was usually so reserved and silent at home, especially in front of my mother. He shone here as the best theorist of his idea, knowledgeable with detailed information about every place we passed by, growing in my eyes in greatness and respect.

The bus set off again, covering distances, and Ibrahim's colleague pointed down to the base of the hill, saying, "Here, at the foot of this hill, lies the village of Deir Yassin," and began explaining the massacre that befell the village, its notoriety, and how it became a symbol of Jewish brutality against the people of Palestine. Shortly after, we arrived in Jerusalem, then to the walls of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Old City in Jerusalem. We walked through the old streets of Jerusalem, with shops on either side of the road displaying all sorts of traditional goods, everything you could want, especially the wooden handicrafts that tourists, filling the streets and alleys of old Jerusalem from all around the world, buy. At every

corner, there were several occupation soldiers from the border guard, carrying their rifles and watching every move and stillness with their eyes.

We approached one of the gates of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. A large number of border guards at that gate scrutinized every visitor, checking their personal identity card, sometimes recording its number. We entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque after they recorded our ID numbers, and the voice of one of the sheikhs through the loudspeakers recited verses from the Holy Quran.

The Dome of the Rock, with its vibrant colors, stood majestically atop the elevated hill. We ascended the stone steps until we reached the gate of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. A sense of awe and reverence overwhelmed me as I took my first steps inside the mosque, holding my shoes in hand. We paused to perform two units of prayer in greeting to the mosque, then sat awaiting the Friday sermon. The preacher ascended the pulpit and delivered a typical sermon, no different from those I've heard in Gaza. We then stood for the Friday prayer and its Sunnah, after which people started to disperse from the mosque.

We regathered and climbed the steps to the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock. Ibrahim began to explain about the mosque and the rock from which Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, ascended to heaven during the Isra and Mi'raj. He explained that the Isra was from Mecca to Jerusalem and the Mi'raj from Jerusalem to the Sidrat al-Muntaha in heaven. He then delved into the significance of Jerusalem being the essential earthly station on this celestial journey.

It could have been possible for the Prophet, peace be upon him, to ascend directly from Mecca to heaven, but God's wisdom dictated this passage through Jerusalem. This was to underline to Muslims the special significance of Jerusalem in their faith, their religion, and their path to heaven. Ibrahim repeatedly emphasized that it was from Jerusalem that the Prophet, peace be upon him, ascended to the heavens. A shiver ran through my body, and I was enveloped by chills I couldn't hide, echoed by those standing beside me. For us, from the Gaza Strip's refugee camps, visiting Jerusalem for the first time – previously just a name with minimal impact – now stood in this sacred place surrounded by occupation forces, allowing entry to some and denying others. It dawned on us that the conflict had another dimension than previously understood; it wasn't just about land and a people displaced but a battle of faith, culture, history, and existence. Ibrahim and those who organized this trip successfully instilled this understanding in us. Amid these reflections, Ibrahim announced it was time to head to the bus

for Hebron, to visit the Ibrahimi Mosque. As we moved towards the gate, extracting our feet from the ground was challenging – the sanctity of the place and the emotions it stirred made leaving willingly difficult, wishing we could stay longer.

Throughout the way to the bus, Ibrahim's words about Salah al-Din's pulpit, which he had prepared years before liberating Jerusalem and placed in front of him as a motivation and driver to move towards Jerusalem to free it from the hands of the Crusaders, kept echoing in my ears. And how it was burned by the sinful Jewish hands in 1968, I wonder to myself, is there a Salah al-Din for this era?

The bus set off towards Hebron, passing through the city of Beit Jala, then Bethlehem, and then the Deheisheh camp, recognized by its densely packed and simple construction. Ibrahim identified this as the Deheisheh camp and then pointed to the other side, where a tent had been pitched on an empty land with dozens of soldiers guarding it. He said, "Here camps Rabbi Moshe Levinger, one of the leading settlers in Hebron, staging a sit-in in front of the Deheisheh camp protesting the occupation forces' failure to protect settlers on their way to Hebron from the camp boys' stones raining down on them day and night." We then passed by Al-Aroub camp, and after a while, we reached Hebron.

Entering the old city's heart, we found it resembling a military barracks for the occupation forces. Hundreds of soldiers here and there, dozens of military vehicles moving in sensitive locations, and barbed wires surrounding many sites and buildings.

Since the mid-1970s, with the support, protection, and coverage of the occupation forces, Jewish settlers began to take over many buildings and locations in the old city, evicting people and settling in them, guarded by dozens of soldiers. Then they start construction, restoration, and changing the face of the Arab area, and every day they take over a new building or location, guarded and supported by the soldiers.

The bus brought us to the Ibrahimi Mosque, where huge numbers of soldiers were stationed, examining the incoming Arabs' IDs and stopping them while Jewish and foreign tourists moved freely. We ascended that long stone staircase, walked through a long corridor next to a long prayer mat-laid courtyard, and entered a side courtyard leading to the main mosque's courtyard in the sanctuary, with two other prayer halls at its other end. We saw numerous tombs with names

deep in history - Ibrahim, Isaac, Sarah, and Joseph, peace be upon them, covered in green cloth. We performed the Maghrib prayer in the mosque, toured to acquaint ourselves with its corners and the history of our nation and faith, then exited where we bought apricot leather, raisins, and pumpkin seeds from vendors at the doors, and then the bus headed back to Gaza.

Everyone started reciting the evening supplications, "We have reached the evening and the whole kingdom belongs to Allah, and all praise is to Allah..." The collective voice of prayer echoed from our throats, as each of us sank into his seat, giving the words we chanted a different meaning than what we were used to when mentioning Muhammad, peace be upon him, and our father Ibrahim, peace be upon him. After this journey, to those sacred places, the words take on a completely different meaning and impact. From that day, I decided to be diligent in performing prayers, never abandoning them again, and I had to start serious preparation for the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (Tawjihi) as only two and a half months were left, and I needed to achieve reasonable grades.

Chapter Fifteen

The first half of the ninth decade of the tenth century of the millennium witnessed many changes on the Palestinian scene, as well as a lot of developments in our ethics and behaviors. I finished my high school studies and decided to join the Islamic University of Gaza, despite the opposition of my brother Mahmoud, who would say, "What? Is this a university? This does not even qualify to be a high school!" However, Hassan supported my idea of studying there, and Ibrahim agreed, and my mother acquiesced to my wish, asking Mahmoud to refrain from commenting on the matter and leave the choice to me, as it concerned me, and I was the one to make the decision, so he reluctantly remained silent.

I enrolled at the Islamic University and was accepted into the Faculty of Science, eagerly awaiting the new academic year and the start of classes, especially since the news had come that the university would undergo significant development this year. It was expected to welcome five hundred students, elect a president holding a Ph.D., and several Ph.D. holders would join the teaching staff. Additionally, a building dedicated to the university was to be constructed.

Throughout the summer break, Ibrahim continued to work in construction with his friend, earning a decent amount of money. He did not stop there; he had now become a professional builder, having learned the trade from his friend. They became partners, employing a worker as an assistant, and began taking on medium-sized construction contracts. It was clear that Ibrahim's self-reliance was shaping him into a man.

My brothers Mahmoud and Hassan each were blessed with a child, as was my sister Fatima. Hassan's business developed as he decided to open his own lathe and milling workshop. He rented a place and began purchasing the necessary machinery for the workshop, not lacking in funds. Muhammad was advancing in his chemistry studies at Birzeit University, finishing each semester with distinction. The university waived the fees as it offered scholarships to outstanding students, so all he needed was just a bit of spending money for living expenses.

At the start of the academic year, we began attending classes in the same building of the Al-Azhar religious institute, and much of what we heard about the university's development began to materialize indeed. The number of accepted students, both male and female, was accurate, and a doctor had arrived to preside

over the university, along with several other Ph.D. holders to teach. They had started to complete a building whose foundations had been laid some time ago to be specifically for the university.

All these were indicators that the university was on its way to becoming a true university, and the good omens confirmed this, making us, the students, more confident about the future. However, we still continued to attend classes in the institute's rooms in the afternoon. The male students attended in the section designated for Al-Azhar students, and the female students in the section for Al-Azhar female students.

The year we were accepted was a preparatory year, where we studied subjects equivalent to our general secondary education along with the Al-Azhar secondary students. Most of these were theoretical subjects, predominantly religious, taught by some sheikhs, along with some introductory scientific subjects, but these were few. Therefore, our level of seriousness and exhaustion from studying was very limited, and we spent most of the year playing, entertaining ourselves, and keeping up with the intellectual conflicts among students of different orientations. It was clear that the students of the Islamic trend were the most numerous among all students, the most organized, and the most capable of presenting their ideas and getting closer to the students, establishing relationships with them.

Fatah youth were less capable but were trying to develop their abilities and level well and continuously. Leftist students were a very small minority, with hardly any notable presence. They formed a small, introverted group with very limited movement.

A month into the year, the university began to seethe with student activity in anticipation of the upcoming student union elections. Concurrently, there were parallel elections for the female students' body. Activists from various factions ramped up their efforts, reaching out to new students to present their ideas and trying to attract these students to join us.

The small cafeteria hall was brimming with debaters at the tables, presenting their ideas or attacking others. After a few days, we began to sense a problem among the activists of the Islamic block, where the majority of them were operating separately from their former leader, who had been behind the events and clashes surrounding the Red Crescent elections.

Days later, we learned that he had separated from them and would run in the elections on his own list, while they would compete on another list. The national

forces from Fatah and the leftist organizations would come together on a third list. Discussions began to intensify, leaflets were distributed, and slogans were hung on the walls. Students from the national bloc frequently pasted pictures of "Abu Ammar" on the walls.

Each list featured the names of its eleven candidates, along with its name and slogan, and began distributing them to supporters and followers. Ibrahim was one of the most prominent activists in the Islamic bloc, and although I did not consider myself part of the Islamic bloc or a supporter of it, I had no choice but to vote for my cousin and his list due to our shared life and my personal admiration for him, which did not allow me to do otherwise, despite having some leanings towards Fatah due to its symbolism and its role in guerrilla warfare and armed resistance.

Election day was my first electoral experience, as it was for many others. We lined up in a long queue, each carrying our personal ID card, which we presented to the verification committee an hour before voting. Then, we were given a ballot paper after crossing our names off the voter list, and we proceeded to one of the designated tables to make our choice, fold the paper, and place it in the ballot box under the supervision of several university employees and an observer from each contesting list. Ibrahim was an observer for his list.

After exiting the polling station, I found a commotion happening on one side of the courtyard. I went over to see what was happening and heard from Fatah activists that activists from the Islamic bloc had torn up pictures of "Abu Ammar" and stepped on them. No doubt, this had a negative impact on some, and it might have influenced the decision of some voters to change their vote away from the Islamic bloc.

After the voting ended, the counting process began, and some preliminary election results started to leak out, sometimes suggesting a win for the Islamic bloc, and other times suggesting that they remained at the university waiting for Ibrahim and the election results. Around eleven o'clock at night, the Dean of Student Affairs announced the results. The Islamic bloc had won distinctively, with a clear margin over the independent bloc that had preceded the national bloc. We returned home late that night, Ibrahim and I, with Ibrahim at the peak of happiness, and my mother at the peak of anxiety waiting for us. Upon reaching home, I remembered what happened when I exited the polling station and asked him if it was true that one of his activists had torn up pictures of "Abu Ammar" and stepped on them. He categorically denied it, affirming that they had

immediately investigated and verified its falsity, and believed it to be an electoral tactic by national bloc activists to pull supporters from the Islamic bloc at the last minute. For me, I believed Ibrahim without a second thought, knowing him to always be truthful, and I had never witnessed him lie, but whether those he inquired were truthful, I wasn't sure.

Despite the outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon, which saw the Palestinian resistance as a key player, the presence of Palestinian resistance in Lebanon remained strong and a constant concern for Israel. Especially since the resistance occasionally launched Katyusha rockets at Israeli settlements in northern Occupied Palestine, notably Kiryat Shmona. Seizing the assassination of an Israeli figure in Europe as a pretext, the Israeli government led by Menachem Begin and his Minister of Defense "Sharon" mobilized their army along the Lebanese border and began the invasion of Lebanon. Some expected the incursion to be limited to a few kilometers to prevent rocket launches, and it seemed that "Begin" thought so too, but "Sharon" pushed the Israeli military deep into Lebanon, besieging Beirut. Faced with the Palestinian leadership's fear of the Israeli army's invasion of Beirut and Palestinian camps with the intent to annihilate the resistance, risking tens of thousands of civilian lives in such a war, the resistance decided to leave Lebanon through mediation. Indeed, the leadership and all armed Palestinians left Lebanon, leaving the camps and Palestinian civilian communities without protection and coordination, leading to the Sabra and Shatila massacre where hundreds of Palestinian refugees, men, women, and children, were killed in one of the most heinous crimes against humanity. As news spread through the media, the situation in the Occupied Territories exploded, marking an extremely difficult and harsh period as nearly every household in the camps had relatives in the Lebanese camps, forcing them to live through the grief and anguish again, amidst painful human stories of mothers unaware of their children's fate, children unknowing of their father's status, or wives uncertain of their husbands' condition.

At the university, we demonstrated very loudly, everyone forgetting their affiliations and disputes, clashing with the occupation forces that passed by on the Thirty Street next to the university. We hurled an unimaginable amount of stones at them, and they did not stop firing bullets at us, launching tear gas grenades. Many students were injured and taken to the Al-Shifa Hospital for treatment.

In Hebron, settlement was increasing daily. Every Saturday, settlers would take over a new house, expelling its inhabitants, moving in, and the army providing them with full protection and support, which exasperated the residents.

Meanwhile, a Fatah commando cell of three young men organized and began planning a strong and deterrent operation against the settlers and the soldiers guarding them in the heart of Hebron. Amidst peak security measures, they acquired weapons, a few rifles and ammunition, and several hand grenades, and began scouting locations trying to choose the easiest and most feasible target where they could inflict the maximum losses on the enemy. After several rounds across the old city for various reasons as a disguise and cover for their real intention, they chose to attack the settlement and military gathering at the Duboyah building. With agility and caution, they snuck into the cemetery overlooking the building from above, took their positions, and waited for the decisive moment. They threw the hand grenades they had and opened fire with their rifles, causing screams and wails to rise from every direction, and none of the soldiers dared to return fire at the attackers until much later.

Shortly after, large forces arrived to reinforce the site and evacuate the dead and wounded. Accounts of the casualties varied, but undoubtedly, the number was significant. A curfew was imposed on the city, and sweeping operations, searches, and investigations began in the city to gather any information on the perpetrators, accompanied by a campaign of deliberate and intended destruction throughout. The curfew lasted many days, and when it was lifted, the occupation forces had imposed new rules in the city. In the sacred Ibrahimi Mosque, which they used to visit only as tourists, they now partitioned off parts for their use, where religious Jewish settlers are almost permanently present, except during Friday prayers.

They placed their seats and menorah in the Yusufiyya hall, and around the clock, dozens of soldiers guarded these places, the religious Jews, and their worship items inside the mosque. Routes were canceled, houses confiscated, and the squeeze on people increased. The density of the occupying forces' patrols, checking their ID cards and conducting searches on them and their belongings in every street or alley they passed through, turned their lives into a real hell. It became evident that people were almost suffocating from what the occupiers and settlers were enforcing.

Jamal was heading to pray at the Ibrahim Mosque, continuing his visits despite all the restrictions and tightening because nothing in the universe should prevent us from praying in our mosque. Everything they do is an attempt to terrorize us and drive us out of the mosque, and as long as we have a pulse, we will never abandon our mosque. Thus, the caring mother and the concerned wife had to accept reality and resorted to praying for protection and safety.

In the University Graduates Association School where he worked, among a large number of teachers who supported Fatah, discussions would explode on every occasion. Those teachers would start attacking him and the Islamists who stood by idly, not participating in armed action against the occupation. He would smile, arguing that for our people to truly fight their ongoing battle, they must arm themselves with the weapon of religion and faith. They must return to their religion so that the battle takes its true dimension and reaches the required level. When people realize that they are struggling and suffering in this life to receive reward and approval in the afterlife, they will bear it easily and will rush their children towards jihad, sacrifice, without being harmed or accused of neglecting their national duty.

It wasn't long before the settlers had formed a secret organization, beginning to prepare and plan for attacking Arabs in Hebron and elsewhere. This group of settlers had weapons, ammunition, explosives, and military experience, as most of its members had served in combat units in the Israeli army. Extreme rabbis supported them, providing religious cover and issuing fatwas to kill as many Arabs as possible, destroy their homes, and places of worship.

In the morning hours, as the students of Hebron University gathered in the campus, a white Peugeot car stopped, and three armed men emerged, opening fire with their automatic weapons on the students. Within minutes, the car sped away, leaving behind dozens of students soaked in their blood, including several martyrs. After a long while, the occupying army and intelligence forces arrived, pretending to investigate the incident. They interrogated several students and bystanders, while people murmured among themselves... What do these people want? Do they think we believe that this incident was not planned and orchestrated by them?

The same group of settlers had rented a house in the Old City of Jerusalem and started to store quantities of advanced explosives, conducting intensive training sessions overseen by retired officers, including plans to blow up the Al-Aqsa Mosque and remove any Islamic traces from it.

The news leaked to the security services, and after consideration, they found that the time was not yet right for the destruction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. They decided to stop this extremist group by arresting them and temporarily imprisoning them, despite their involvement in killing many and planning highly dangerous acts.

Around the same time, an extremist religious movement called the "Temple Faithful" announced its intention to enter the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound to lay the foundation stone for their temple on the ruins of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, indicating they might use force to do so. Not long before, one of the extremists had stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque, shooting at the Muslim guards working for the Islamic Waqf, and the worshippers, killing several of them.

The news of this group's intention to storm the Al-Aqsa Mosque spread everywhere, reaching the Islamic University before noon. Immediately, a number of student council members, led by Ibrahim, gathered in the university courtyard and started a speech festival about the dangers threatening the Al-Aqsa Mosque. They announced that they would depart with any students willing to join them to Jerusalem. Some couldn't travel to Jerusalem without informing their families, while others didn't hesitate to give their bags and books to their peers to take home and inform their families about their departure to Jerusalem. Ibrahim and I were among those who did so.

The bus took off to Jerusalem with one of the university's teachers, Sheikh Younis, aboard. We wished the bus could fly us to Jerusalem so we could shield the Al-Aqsa Mosque with our bodies. Throughout the journey, the Sheikh spoke to us about the virtue of this sacred land and the merit of jihad in it, inflaming our emotions beyond their original fervor.

Upon arriving at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, we found it crowded with men, women, and children in a large, unorganized gathering. We, about sixty in number, gathered in one of the mosque's corners and formed a leadership headed by Ibrahim, with the Sheikh as our guide and motivator. We were divided into several groups, each tasked with protecting one of the doors through which the aggressors were expected to come. We had nothing to defend ourselves with but our hands, sticks, and stones at our disposal. We took our positions, instructed not to leave them under any circumstances, fearing that the attackers might assault the Al-Aqsa Mosque from multiple locations, and the disorganized crowd would rush to the first door reported to be under attack.

Each squad was split into two groups for performing prayers at their times—one group would pray while the other continued guarding. Once the first group finished praying, it took over the guarding positions, allowing the second group to pray. As night fell and movements quieted, suggesting a potentially prolonged situation, it was agreed that the first group would sleep for the first half of the

night and then return, allowing the second group to sleep during the latter half. The leadership group distributed commands to all teams to ensure unified action.

Those who stayed for guard duty began to feel the night's chill, prompting several locals to bring wool blankets, providing one for each of us to wrap ourselves in. We settled by the stone walls and pillars, contemplating the sanctity of the place and its historical phases, whispering to ourselves the honor of standing guard at Al-Aqsa to protect it from any vile enemy.

We reminisced about the Prophet's Isra and Mi'raj, remembered Saladin the Victorious, and our eyes welled with tears, with some quietly sobbing. The second group replaced us at midnight, to whom we handed over the blankets for warmth and stones for defense. We then headed to the Al-Aqsa Mosque's courtyard, laying down some mats to lie on and covering ourselves with others, until the dawn prayer, when we rose, performed ablutions, and joined the other worshippers for Fajr prayer.

One of the Al-Aqsa Mosque guards noticed our level of organization and preparedness, whispering to Ibrahim that there were hundreds of iron pipes, used for constructing scaffolding, available. "Take them and use them if necessary," he suggested.

As the sun rose, another busload of university students arrived, increasing our numbers to over a hundred, each armed with an iron pipe, significantly more effective than bare arms or stones. Everyone took their positions, and people started flooding into the mosque again. Occasionally, rumors circulated that an attack would come from the Maghreb Gate, drawing crowds there, while university students remained at their posts. We noticed a more organized group of young men and adults among the general populace, who also recognized us and identified Ibrahim as our leader. They introduced themselves as devout young men from the 1948 occupied territories, particularly from the town of Umm al-Fahm. They immediately joined us, becoming part of our teams. Their most distinctive traits were extraordinary kindness and an incredible readiness for sacrifice. It wasn't long before one of them would start chanting or singing, elevating our spirits with noble themes about sacrificing for Al-Aqsa with soul and blood, causing our tears to flow freely and our grips on the iron pipes to tighten.

The day designated by the Temple Mount Faithful passed without them daring to approach the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We stayed an additional day for reassurance. After confirming the absence of threat and performing the Dhuhr prayer in the

mosque, we sat in a circle in the courtyard. Sheikh Younis spoke about our venture for Allah's sake to protect our Al-Aqsa, which didn't result in an encounter with the enemy, nor did any of us achieve martyrdom. He then prayed extensively, asking Allah to protect Al-Aqsa from their plots and grant us martyrdom and the merit of jihad. We all echoed "Ameen" with tears streaming down our faces and sobs rising. Then, the bus took us back to Gaza, enveloped in silence all the way.

Our trip to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and meeting our people from the inside reminded us of another part of our torn nation scattered across various regions. This was the first time we interacted closely with people from the inside; I had heard little about them before, but this encounter quickly endeared them to my heart, admiring their virtues, kindness, and light-heartedness.

Among everything, their resilience throughout the years of occupation stands out the most. Despite all attempts to strip them of their Arab identity, Islam, and Palestinian heritage, they remain firmer than anyone could imagine who hasn't met them and witnessed their spirit and readiness.

My brother, Mohammad, had met some of the youths from the inside during his visit to Hebron University. As it is customary for activists from different lists, Mohammad and his colleagues would tour other universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, meeting with activists from their ideological stream to coordinate activities and stances.

During one of these visits to Hebron University, one of the activists invited them to a student house for lunch. There, they were warmly welcomed by a group of youths who prepared lunch and dined with them. Mohammad learned that they were from the 1948 areas, from towns like Umm al-Fahm and Kafr Qasim, and it was evident that these youths possessed incredibly kind souls and a high level of religiosity. Their years living under occupation only strengthened their commitment to their faith and cause.

Mohammad graduated with honors from the College of Science, which immediately enabled him to be accepted as a teaching assistant in the Chemistry Department at Birzeit University. My mother had been looking forward to his graduation and return to settle in Gaza, but his appointment at the university meant he would continue spending most of his time in the West Bank. This was a persistent problem for my mother due to Mohammad's absence in Ramallah. However, it solved another issue, as he would need a new room upon returning

as a graduate, and our house did not have the space. When discussing his accommodation in Ramallah, he confirmed that he would live in a shared apartment with the same students as during his studies for at least the first year.

One day, after our stay at Al-Aqsa Mosque and while we were having a family gathering at home, I inadvertently started talking about that event. Despite Ibrahim's stern looks, I couldn't hold back or stop myself. Immediately, Mahmoud began criticizing Ibrahim and Mohammad Mohsen as members of the Islamic stream, accusing them of not participating in armed resistance and settling for political and mass work instead. He argued that their leadership was under suspicion for hindering the youth's potential for resistance in the name of religion.

Mohammad, who seemed to have gained significant experience in political discussions through his involvement in student activities, responded: "Anyone listening to you would think your guns never stop firing and that your operations will make the Jews flee within hours. You know that for years there has been nothing resembling an armed resistance, and all attempts are weak and die in their infancy, right, engineer?"

The next day, as we went to pray Maghrib at the mosque, the youths sat in their usual circle, and Sheikh Mohammad asked for permission to speak. "Sheikh Ahmad, allow me, for there's a question I'd like you to answer because it's frequently raised in every occasion we face: Where is the role of Islamists in national work, I mean, the resistance?" Sheikh Ahmad smiled, looking around at the faces of those present and said, "We are now in a stage of education and preparation," and began to explain the importance of education in building the future of nations and peoples aspiring to achieve noble goals, then moved on to the topic he intended to address from the beginning.

The phrases "preparation and education" or "education and preparation" resonated throughout our discussions at home, at Um Al-Abd's house in the presence of her son Abdul Hafeez, or at the university in any debate addressing the Islamists' stance on armed resistance at the current time. Whenever someone from the national trend questioned their role, their Islamist counterpart would reply, "We are now in a stage of education and preparation," often citing the Islamic call's first man, Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, who spent many years on educational and da'wah work before starting jihad by the sword.

One day, we returned home late to find our mother extremely worried. We learned that a policeman had delivered a summons for Ibrahim, asking him to report to the intelligence headquarters the following morning and warning him against delay. Ibrahim was not distressed nor did he show any worry or fear, reassuring our mother that this was routine and many youths were summoned in this manner, asked a few questions, and then allowed to leave.

The next day, Ibrahim went for that interview, where he was detained in one of the booths along with several others who were wanted, for long hours until Asr (afternoon prayer). Afterwards, he was brought into the office of the intelligence officer in charge of our area, known by the nickname Abu Wadi'. The officer started asking him ordinary social questions about his family, relatives, residence, studies, and Ibrahim gave very brief and concise answers. Abu Wadi' tried to draw him into more extensive conversations, but Ibrahim stuck to being succinct.

After a short while, the questions shifted towards his student activities at the university, to which Ibrahim responded with either "yes" or "I don't know," provoking Abu Wadi', who yelled, "Do you think we don't know about your activities and relationships? That we don't know your head is as hard as a rock?" Ibrahim remained silent, further infuriating the intelligence officer who started pushing Ibrahim or giving him light slaps, yet Ibrahim did not react and his face turned red. Abu Wadi' yelled about "education and preparation... why education and preparation?" Ibrahim looked at him and said, "I don't know what you're talking about?" Abu Wadi' laughed, "I knew you'd say that and I don't expect anything else from you. But just so you know, we are aware that you repeat these words and that you've said it hundreds of times in response to the national bloc students' questions about your role in sabotage activities against the State of Israel. Be informed that we are monitoring you, and we know every breath you take and the moment you think of doing something other than talk, we'll know how to put you in prison."

Abu Wadi' handed him his identity card, saying, "All this hatred filling your eyes like a mule's, don't bring it with you when I call you again. Leave it at home." Ibrahim took his ID card and left the room, smiling a smile that was not easy to hide.

Chapter Sixteen

Aunt Fathiya was blessed with a daughter named "Mona," and despite the newborn's beauty, cheerfulness, and charm, she never distracted Aunt Fathiya from her son, Abdel Rahim, who had started to crawl and speak. They began preparing him to start school with the new academic year. Abdel Rahim was a handsome, dark-skinned child with a sharp sense of humor. If someone upset him, he would sulk and remain sullen until he could vent his anger by hitting the person who upset him. He was particularly attached to his uncle, Abdel Rahman, who had gotten married after finishing his university studies and had a daughter named "Ruqaya."

Uncle Abdel Rahman adored him greatly, and whenever he had the chance, he would take his little hand, after his mother had gotten him ready, and take him out of the house, either to the mountain or for a stroll in the village in its tranquil evening after sunset. He would buy him what he liked from a nearby shop and often took him to the mosque to pray Maghrib, with Abdel Rahim standing next to his uncle, mimicking him in prayer. If his uncle prolonged the prostration during a Sunnah prayer, Abdel Rahim would lift his head to check his uncle's position and if he saw him prostrating, he would return to prostration. Then, he would sit with him in the mosque alongside a group of young men who frequented the mosque to discuss a jurisprudential issue, a historical matter, or an event from the Prophet's biography. Abdel Rahim would sit cross-legged, slightly bowing his head then raising his gaze to the speakers, resting his head on his hands supported by his knees.

His uncle would also take him to Hebron to visit his friend and colleague, Jamal, where they would sit in the house engaging in conversation with other friends who would join them to discuss religious, political, and other issues. Sometimes, they would go to one of the mosques in Hebron or to a friend's house for a visit.

Political awareness in the Occupied Territories had clearly developed, especially among youth congregations and specifically in universities, institutes, and high schools. The competition between political forces and political thought was gradually escalating, especially as each force attempted to secure the largest number of positions for itself. For example, in universities, each current tried to win over the students to ensure its victory in the student council elections.

During this competition, small and limited clashes always occurred but were quickly and easily resolved. However, as the power of the Islamic current began to compete in all areas, a severe sensitivity arose among the national current, especially led by Fatah. The national current, representing the different factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), considered itself the extension of the organization, which is the legitimate and sole representative of the Palestinian people. This has been the recognition the Palestinian people were accustomed to over decades, acknowledged by the Arab League, Arab countries, the United Nations, and other international institutions.

Suddenly, the Islamic current emerged in the Occupied Territories, growing significantly and competing in many positions against representatives of the PLO factions, winning many of them or achieving good percentages in others. This situation was extremely worrying, further aggravated by two other concerns. Firstly, this group did not shoulder any operational responsibility in the armed struggle against the occupation. Secondly, it did not recognize the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Although its leaders and chiefs did not explicitly state this, they also did not clearly acknowledge this fact, providing diplomatic answers that were neither a clear no nor a yes when asked.

With the growth of this current across the Occupied Territories, especially in Gaza and specifically in the Islamic University, which came under almost complete control of the Islamic current through student council elections and staff body elections, the situation became increasingly concerning. Serious attempts were made to rebalance the situation, likely following directives from leadership abroad to earnestly resolve matters. This led to sharp frictions in many places, occasionally escalating into clashes that started in universities and spread to streets and alleys of areas and refugee camps. Attacks from one side on members of the other, followed by retaliatory responses, resulted in a series of assaults causing physical harm requiring treatment in many cases.

In this atmosphere, everyone was aligning themselves with their groups and organizations, showing loyalty even if just through words and defending their positions. This immediately reflected within our home. My brother Mahmoud was a Fatah supporter, my brothers Hassan and Mohammed and my cousin Ibrahim were from the Islamic bloc, and our neighbour and relative (Hassan's brother-in-law) was from the Popular Front. The moment any conflicts or clashes of this nature erupted, it directly impacted our home and relationships, turning discussions into heated arguments and shouting matches about who did what,

questioning each other's actions and beliefs. My mother would try to mediate and cool things down to at least avoid physical fights, and I usually stood by her side. Mahmoud's wife would stand by him, and Hassan's wife by him... And eventually, everyone would disperse to their rooms, deliberately avoiding each other, clearly upset and angry.

Ibrahim's presence in the university and his leadership role in the Islamic bloc earned him an extraordinary level of respect, almost sanctified. Being at the university myself and close to him, I noticed this clearly and was often concerned someone might attack him, so I tried to stay close whenever possible and permitted by my schedule and his movements. He would sometimes disappear or be sitting or standing with bloc activists, where I wouldn't intrude, guessing they were discussing private matters they wouldn't want me to hear.

It seemed information about Ibrahim's role reached my brother Mahmoud through Fatah activists at the university, who considered Mahmoud one of their leaders. I could see the irritation and anger on Mahmoud's face towards Ibrahim, unable to approach or even speak to him without causing upset, which was a red line for my mother since upsetting Ibrahim was akin to a disaster, as we had been taught since their mother left him.

Occasionally, Mahmoud tried to engage Ibrahim in a conversation, holding his temper to prevent an escalation. My mother would intervene, pouring her wrath on Mahmoud's head, prompting him to argue that the situation wasn't as Ibrahim and his group portrayed, implying they bore some responsibility for the clashes. Ibrahim would smile and say, "Man, you're trying to pin this on us... We didn't start the clash, and you're not ready to acknowledge our existence as a popular force and a political and social stream different from yours." Mahmoud would counter, "You're inclined to violence, using sticks, chains, and batons, you don't recognize the PLO, don't carry your weight in armed struggle, and attack representatives of the national movement while the occupation watches." Ibrahim would look at him reproachfully, questioning if this was an accusation of collaboration, that they were the occupation's favorites. Mahmoud would try to backpedal, "I'm not accusing you, Ibrahim, not you, but perhaps your leaders have personal agendas." Ibrahim would respond, "We never initiated a clash; we've always defended ourselves. The core issue is your unwillingness to recognize our existence as a competing force as if the mandate for Palestinian work and control over institutions and associations is registered solely in your names. You must acknowledge there's a competing force that disagrees with many

of your views and positions." At this point, my mother, who had been paying attention and monitoring the discussion, would intervene, asking to stop this conversation and not bring street problems into our home disputes.

On one occasion, the military governor sent a notification requesting the presence of Ibrahim and other activists from various factions at his headquarters. When Ibrahim arrived, he found a group of about ten activists. The governor started calling them into his office one by one. When it was Ibrahim's turn, the governor began to speak with him and held him responsible for the ongoing events. Ibrahim objected to this approach, clarifying that he had no connection to the clashes taking place. The governor then shifted tactics, questioning how, as a people under occupation desiring independence, they could fight and quarrel among themselves, implying they were a people undeserving of life.

Ibrahim found himself in a dilemma; not responding would be a severe blow, and responding might affirm the ongoing situation or his part in it. After thinking for a moment, he said, "Firstly, I want to affirm that I have no connection to what is happening. However, I believe you are aware that all peoples living under occupation or those with sovereignty and institutions, like our people, experience disputes and clashes. This has happened among you repeatedly, both in ancient and recent times, including the Haganah's actions against the Irgun."

The governor was taken aback, unable to hide his surprise, and asked, "Where did you learn this?" Ibrahim responded, "It's written in books." The governor tried to turn the tables on Ibrahim, saying, "I'm proud that someone like you considers the Jewish people a role model and example." Ibrahim retorted, "I did not mention that as a role model or example, but rather as a historical model. And I reiterate to you once again that I have no connection to what is happening."

Day by day, my respect and admiration for Ibrahim grew. He was orphaned by his father, who was martyred when he was four years old, and later abandoned by his mother while still young. Raised among us, he became a self-made man and a true leader despite his young age and the challenging circumstances under occupation.

I watched him as he moved around the university campus, talking to one, directing another, issuing orders and instructions, and managing affairs as he wished. Then you'd find him engaging in thoughtful discussion and debate. Above all, he was modest, blushing easily, his face quickly turning red with a rush of blood to his cheeks.

The occupation was preventing construction at the university in an attempt to contain and restrict it. However, it was necessary to impose a policy of creating a fait accompli. The number of students, both male and female, had exceeded one thousand five hundred, and the number of academic and administrative staff had increased to such an extent that no one, neither students nor observers, could doubt that the university had passed the stage of danger and was now on the path to becoming a formal institution.

This turned into a challenge against the occupation, which fights us in everything, including education. Thus, you saw us erecting tents and palm frond arbors to study under, with Ibrahim overseeing the work with great seriousness and attention, instilling in the students a spirit of perseverance and challenge. Each of us came to the university feeling it was part of our national duty first, before our academic interest. The name "University of Tents" began to imprint itself on the Islamic University, and this became a source of our pride and dignity. The occupation could not stand against the will of a people for education and began to accept the reality, pushing us to move forward.

Suddenly, without prior warning, several trucks entered the university, unloading large quantities of building materials. Ibrahim transformed from a student and activist into a contractor, with him, a number of respectable students, and hundreds of us helping them to build brick classrooms with asbestos roofs.

Thus, a fait accompli was imposed on the occupation, and several classrooms were equipped for study. After a while, several other classrooms were prepared, followed by a third batch, making it clear that we had become independent of the palm frond arbors and tents. All of this only elevated Ibrahim in my eyes and in my heart, adding to his greatness, nobility, and love.

Ibrahim was studying and excelling in his studies, engaging in his student activities, and held a prestigious position among his peers as a leader in his group. Above all, he was involved in construction work, earning money that sufficed for his expenses. But it didn't stop there; one evening while we were sitting at home, he turned to my mother saying, "I want to suggest something and I don't want you to be upset with me." She replied, "You know I don't get upset with you and I know you wouldn't say anything that would upset me." He said, "But it seems this is the first time I'll do that, so I hope you'll forgive me." My mother looked at him in surprise and wonder, asking, "What's the matter, Ibrahim?"

He answered while reaching into his pocket and pulling out a bundle of money, "I want to contribute to the household expenses. I'm now a man earning a lot of money and I must contribute to the expenses. It's enough that you..." My mother interrupted Ibrahim, exclaiming, "What's gotten into you? Have you lost your mind?" Ibrahim mumbled, "Auntie, I'm now..." My mother shouted again, "No, not now or ever... Forget about this nonsense. If you have extra money, give it to me and I'll save it for you because you might need it tomorrow or the day after. Anyway, it will be needed when we marry you off after you graduate from university." Then she began to speak to him tenderly, "Whenever you have an extra penny, bring it to me to save for you. It will be needed, Ibrahim."

It seems the refusal did not sit well with him, as I would see him every few days returning home carrying an envelope or a bag filled with groceries, fruits, vegetables, or sweets, bringing them home as a form of participation. My mother would look at him with admiration and respect, muttering, "Ah, what can I do with you, Ibrahim. May God be pleased with you."

Armed resistance had significantly diminished, and the saying "every death of a Jew causes so and so" became popular to illustrate the rarity or non-existence of such events. Not only did deaths among enemies decrease, but any form of resistance did. The signs of military alertness dwindled, the number of patrols roaming the streets reduced, and curfews were very rarely imposed. Nighttime curfews were lifted, allowing people to be on the beach at night in many areas.

Buses filled with Jews began to come to all areas, for example, to the heart of Gaza City on Saturdays for outings and shopping due to the cheap prices, despite the significant negative impact on the conservative level of the country when dozens of buses carrying scantily clad girls and women arrive.

Intelligence officers, responsible for the areas, began to roam the streets in their Subaru cars, even stopping at any time of day or night, anywhere, calling over passersby to check their ID cards, interrogate them, or converse without any fear or caution. Sometimes, if they saw something suspicious in an alley, they would chase someone down those alleys, a stark contrast to the large forces that couldn't invade the camp before. Now, you might see them shouting at or even slapping and kicking the young men they stopped, then driving off without returning their ID cards, demanding they follow him to his office, and woe to that young man if he did not comply.

The movement of workers to the inside became unrestricted, and many of these workers and craftsmen formed friendships with their Jewish employers. It wasn't limited to work relationships but extended to social ones. If a worker requested a week off for marriage, the employer would inquire about the date and inform him that he would come with his wife to congratulate and bring a gift. It was common to find an Israeli car with a yellow license plate entering the camp, stopping, and asking in Hebrew or broken Arabic for the house of groom so-and-so, where they would park, enter with gifts, and leave without anyone objecting.

The occupation's intelligence had begun to infiltrate the camp gradually, systematically, and deliberately. Anyone opposing or objecting would find the intelligence officer responsible for the area sending dozens of summonses to young men and men to his office. They would sit in the waiting room for hours, then be called in one by one, to be beaten, threatened, warned, bargained with, consoled, and efforts made to recruit them. Sometimes they succeeded in ensnaring some of the weak-willed. Anyone

wanting to travel abroad for study, to visit relatives, for work, needing a building permit, to open a workshop or store, or not needing anything at all had to go through the intelligence officer's office where bargaining began, and services were offered in exchange for very simple tasks from the citizen.

If initial cooperation is found, it is understood that it could be developed into collaboration and betrayal. The situation did not stop there but exceeded to a point where a number of agents became famous and known, carrying pistols on their sides, roaming the streets at will, entering the intelligence office whenever they wish, harassing and assaulting people. Some, when in need of a permit or license, which is denied by the intelligence officer, could turn to one of these well-known agents seeking their mediation to obtain their needs, for which the agent would demand a commission.

One of the neighbours' sons had gone to study medicine in Turkey. After six years and only his internship year left, he was prevented from traveling. Repeatedly visiting the intelligence officer, who refused each time to issue him a travel permit, his feet became worn out from so much walking. Advised by someone, he approached one of the agents for help. That agent demanded a large commission of five hundred Jordanian Dinars. When the man argued that the amount was too large, the agent sarcastically replied, "I am an agent for the Jews; if you could, you would kill me, so I must suck your blood before that happens."

Some opened offices for issuing permits and similar transactions that could only be done with intelligence permission, making commissions, accumulating wealth, and driving luxury cars. It became clear that through its agents, the occupation's intelligence started promoting the trade and use of hashish, drugs, and alcohol. They considered this a means to destroy the nation and kill any spirit of resistance, while the agents saw it as a quick way to make money with their appearance protected. The agents began to promote corruption and immorality by spreading obscene pictures, magazines, and sexual videotapes among boys and girls.

Aware activists from various organizations saw these dark, murky images, and not only could they not act against this phenomenon, but they also all came under constant surveillance by these agents. Since my brother Mahmoud and my cousin Ibrahim were well-known activists, an agent closely monitored our main house's door, not knowing we had another door, previously my uncle's. Thus, Mahmoud and Ibrahim would quietly leave the house through the back door, while those suspects thought they were still inside.

All the youth in the camp knew many stories of women and girls who had fallen into collaboration and started working with the intelligence as prostitutes to trap young men into sexual activities. They would then be photographed in shameful and compromising positions, and the intelligence would attempt to blackmail and threaten them to work with them.

Stories became known about beauty salons or photo studios owned by agents turning into dens for moral entrapment as a prelude to security entrapment. These stories were particularly exposed after several suicide incidents of girls who wrote letters to their families saying they had been deceived into going to a certain salon where they were drugged and found themselves violated and photographed in disgraceful poses. They were threatened to cooperate with the intelligence, or else be exposed, leading them to prefer death and suicide.

Many of these stories, with names of those who committed suicide, names of the shops, and names of those who engaged in these disgraceful acts, became well-known. It was clear that the occupation's intelligence, using its agents, systematically practiced spreading organized corruption to destroy the people and end any hope of a future for liberation or resistance. Every day, their methods in this field evolved, to the extent that one of the well-known agents' offices would announce registration for a tourist trip to areas inside the Green Line. During these trips, with dozens of naive young men, several prostitutes known for their

collaboration with the occupation's intelligence were taken along. During the trip and at those tourist spots, attempts were made to entangle those young men in scenes and situations that were photographed, thereby threatening them with scandal or informing their families unless they agreed to cooperate with the intelligence.

One young man from the camp who went on one of these trips got entangled when they took compromising photos of him. The intelligence officer responsible for the camp summoned him to his office and proposed he collaborate with him, which he refused. The officer then showed him those photos, threatening to expose him in the camp and tarnish his image. The young man persisted in his refusal. "Abu Wadi' said, "I'll give you a week to think. After a week, I'll summon you again, and if you don't agree to help me, you'll see how I expose you."

The young man left in a panic, feeling he had fallen into a trap. If he refused to cooperate, he would be disgraced throughout the camp, and his reputation would be tarnished. If he agreed to cooperate, he would become more entangled and forced to betray his people and his homeland. Eventually, he turned to one of his friends, seeking a way out. His friend, finding himself in a dilemma due to lack of experience with such matters, accompanied the troubled young man to Mahmoud, hoping he could offer some advice. They explained the situation to Mahmoud.

Mahmoud scolded the young man for going on such trips in the first place, for getting close to collaborators, and for getting himself into this mess. He assured him that his problem was already solved because he had the courage to talk about it with his friend and sought advice from Mahmoud. Intelligence agencies typically do not publish such photos but use them to threaten naive young men. Their fear of public exposure could make them agree to cooperate. If the intelligence officer called him again, he should make it clear that he was not afraid of the scandal, that the officer could publish the photos, and he himself would distribute copies around the camp if necessary.

The young man was summoned a few days later and did as Mahmoud advised. This infuriated Abu Wadi', who began threatening him, but eventually, he dismissed the young man from his office, stating he would give him more time to reconsider. If he still refused to cooperate, Abu Wadi' warned, he would make his life miserable. One evening, as Abu Wadi' was patrolling the camp streets in his car and spotted the young man shopping, he stopped to call him over.

Realizing this, the young man turned and fled into an alley, with Abu Wadi' chasing after him.

Mahmoud and his colleagues often discussed these topics in their meetings, deliberating on how to counteract the intelligence activities and their collaborators without finding a feasible solution. It seemed the situation had reached a point where the proverb "the rip has expanded beyond repair" applied.

Their dilemma worsened when Hassan, a cousin, returned to the camp. His Jewish lover had kicked him out after their business with her father collapsed, leading to bankruptcy. Wandering aimlessly, he decided to return to the camp. When he arrived home, it was clear he no longer belonged among them; he had become more like the Jews than his own people, and no one could bear his presence.

Despite this, Mahmoud proposed giving him a chance to reform and reintegrate into his natural setting. They cleared out the guest room for him and tried to make him feel the warmth of returning to the family. However, he was incapable of feeling warmth or affection. Every day he would cause trouble with the neighbours or infringe on their honor, leading to complaints. Mahmoud tried advising him without success until they unanimously decided to expel him from the house, with Ibrahim being the most adamant about it.

When Hassan returned from one of his escapades in a similar state, Ibrahim confronted him sternly and made it clear he had no place among them. He should leave wherever he wished. After a decisive conversation in which all participated, Hassan picked up a few of his belongings, including his television, and left muttering curses, mostly in Hebrew and some in broken Arabic. They thought they had finally rid themselves of the trouble he caused with the neighbours.

Days later, they learned he was living with a notorious woman, and news began to circulate that he was involved in drug trafficking and promoting indecent materials, clearly indicating his ties to intelligence. This was confirmed when some of Mohammed's friends informed him that Hassan was regularly visiting Abu Wadi"s office without any restrictions.

Their family's reputation in the camp had always been impeccable, with Mahmoud's status in Fatah and Ibrahim's in the Islamic movement positioning them as pillars of national work and religious integrity. Suddenly, Hassan's reappearance threatened to tarnish this image. Hassan, known for his corruption

and suspected dealings, caused the greatest harm to his brother Hassan, as people would become apprehensive upon hearing his name, associating it with the notorious "Hassan Al-Saleh." Every time his name was mentioned, Hassan had to explain the situation from the beginning, though listeners were not always convinced.

Hassan became our primary concern, and despite the neighbourhood and camp's familiarity with us, we began to feel the need to walk with our heads down, ashamed of the stigma that had befallen us. How could we rid ourselves of this curse? We had to act, but our helplessness was evident. Ibrahim came to me one day, saying, "Ahmed, I need to discuss something with you, and I ask for your promise not to tell anyone." I promised, and he said, "We must kill Hassan!!" I was shocked and looked at him in disbelief, speechless. He repeated, "Yes, we must kill him. Either we do it publicly, to erase the shame that has befallen us, and I am ready to pay the price with a life sentence, or we do it secretly. The important thing is to erase him from the face of the Earth."

I understood Ibrahim's pain and what we all suffered from Hassan's actions and reputation, but I was not ready to go to such lengths, even in thought. However, a solution was necessary. I suggested to Ibrahim that we ambush Hassan and break his legs so he would remain bedridden in that house and stop harming others. I made it clear that I was not willing to go any further... and he agreed.

We informed Hassan of our plan, and he immediately agreed, readying three iron pipes and three masks for us. Indeed, we lay in wait for him, and one night, as he returned drunk to his ominous house, we pounced on him. Ibrahim struck him on the head, and he fell. I whispered to Ibrahim, "Don't hit his head, just his legs," and we pummeled his legs and arms senselessly, then left the scene, with Hassan hiding the pipes and masks.

By the next morning, news had spread that a group attempted to kill Hassan. He survived with severe injuries, both legs and one arm broken, and a skull fracture. He was taken to the hospital, and we showed no concern. Everyone looked at us, their eyes saying, "You did it, God bless your hands."

A few days later, the police came and took all the young men from the house for interrogation regarding the attempted murder of Hassan. We denied it, arguing how could we kill our cousin, our own flesh and blood, as blood does not turn to water. We were detained for about two weeks and then released after no evidence was found against us. Despite our two-week detention, Hassan remained in the

hospital wrapped in casts for over two months. Upon his release, he was left with a limp distinguishable even in the dark. However, he bought a white Peugeot 504 and continued to move around, but we no longer heard about his scandals in the camp.

In 1985, a prisoner exchange took place between Israel and the General Command "Ahmed Jibril," releasing many Palestinian prisoners who had spent years in jails, mostly from Fatah and the Popular Front, and some from the Islamic movement in prisons who were originally from the Popular Liberation Forces. Their release turned the occupied territories into a national celebration across the homeland, with celebrations and well-wishers everywhere...

On the other hand, this represented a clear boost in national and security awareness among the Palestinian people. The release of these experienced and seasoned individuals had a significant impact on the political debate on various issues. When these freed individuals were present in councils, our home, and at work, but patrols by suspects around the house did not cease; instead, they intensified and became more frequent, happening throughout the day and night.

My brother Sheikh Mohammed became acquainted with one of his devout female students, and it was clear he was drawn to her, reciprocating glances filled with modesty and a clear message of mutual feelings. He returned to Gaza on Thursday, stayed with us until Friday, when he informed our mother about the girl and sought her permission to take the first steps. After some hesitation, she consented, insisting she must see the girl first as she considered Mohammed to be like a "blind cat" who might not find the girl beautiful enough.

Mohammed returned to Birzeit and asked the girl to allow him a two-minute private conversation, almost bursting with shyness. He asked if he could propose to her parents for her hand in marriage. Her cheeks flushed with blood, enhancing her beauty, and she nodded in agreement, providing her family's address.

The following Friday, Mohammed took a family delegation, including our mother, my brothers Mahmoud and Hassan, my aunt, and my sisters Fatima and Tihani, to the girl's house. My mother was undoubtedly impressed and later joked about Mohammed being like a "blind cat," which turned out to be a "disaster." The girl's family agreed, and the engagement was announced, with the marriage contract and wedding planned for after her graduation in a year and a half, which suited Mohammed and us.

Chapter Seventeen

Jamaal and several of his brothers from Hebron drive their cars heading to Suraif to visit their friend Abdul-Rahman. Knocking on the door, Abdul-Raheem, living at the door, rushes out to find his uncle's and his elder friends, most of whom he knows from visiting them with his uncle since childhood. He greets them with a smile, "Welcome, please come in," and makes way for them to the guest room, while his uncle Abdul-Rahman comes rushing, welcoming them. They sit and talk, and Abdul-Raheem considers himself one of them despite the age difference of over twenty-five years.

The women prepare lunch and bring it to the room's door, where Abdul-Rahman and Abdul-Raheem come out to bring it in. After lunch, they go out for a walk at the edge of the village, with Abdul-Raheem accompanying them.

The land is fertile plains but lacks good cultivation and has remains of wires stretching over long distances. Abdul-Rahman points to the wires, saying, "This is the ceasefire line; beyond it are the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 and 1967, and part of our village's lands to the west of the wire. Our family had forty dunams confiscated in '48, and this part continues our land by a few dunams, which we cannot farm due to its proximity to the border. Don't forget this, Abdul-Raheem." Abdul-Raheem nods, muttering, "How can I forget, uncle? How can I forget?" Jamaal murmurs, "How can he forget? How can we forget? How can one live without his heart and limbs...?"

They drive back to Hebron, with Abdul-Raheem sitting next to his uncle. On the way, dozens of cars bearing yellow license plates, indicating they are Israeli, move in both directions. Jamaal lets out a frustrated sigh, saying, "Then what about these settlers? They have swallowed the land and are never satisfied, never stopping at any limit..."

Entering the city as the Maghrib prayer call begins, the driver heads towards the Ibrahimi Mosque. The car can barely move due to the congestion, as hundreds of settlers and occupying soldiers guard their way to the mosque. They walk to enter the mosque, with tens of guns drawn by the occupying soldiers. The Jewish settlers, wearing small decorated hats on their heads, long unkempt beards, and wrapped in striped cloths with many threads dangling, hurry to the mosque, jostling its people and stopping them at every barrier.

The young men enter the mosque, where the carpet has been removed from the back part, and barriers of iron pillars with thick ropes define the prayer area... Only a quarter of the mosque is for prayer, with the other three-quarters, along with the outer courtyard and two attached halls, filled with Jews ("Ah... It's Saturday," Jamaal mutters). In every corner, a Jew stands reading from a book in an incomprehensible and rapid manner, swaying back and forth.

The call to prayer is made, and Jamaal leads the prayer. The congregation stands behind him, responding thunderously to the supplication ("not of those who have incurred [Your] wrath or of those who are astray") Amen. Jamaal begins reciting with a beautiful, resonant voice ("Exalted is He who took His Servant by night...") until Allah's saying (and We have prepared Hell for the disbelievers as a bed) [Al-Isra: 8], they bow and the Jewish worshipers behind them sway while chanting from their Torah.

I left the lecture hall from my last lecture, which was late as the sun was about to set, and found my cousin Ibrahim in a nearby hall. Greeting him with peace, he returned the greeting. I asked if he was heading home, and he replied yes. We set off together, each carrying our books, surrounded by many students heading home, with a bus parked at the university gate, gathering students from southern regions to return to their homes.

We walked back home on foot. From a distance, a military jeep stood watching the students leaving the university. Ibrahim glanced at them and said, "Who would have believed that Gaza would actually have a real university as it does now? Do you remember, Ahmad, when I decided to enroll in the Islamic University, what your mother's reaction was?" I nodded in agreement. Across the street, a car filled with members of the Islamic bloc, Ibrahim's friends, called out to him. After exchanging a few words, he returned to me, handing over his books, saying, "Take these with you. I'm going on an errand with the guys and might be late, so reassure the 'government' (referring to his mother)." Smiling, I took his folder and books, thinking about our 'government' (my mother), her way of dealing with Ibrahim, her love for him, and his for her, as memories began to flood my mind. I was jolted back to reality by the honking of a car that nearly hit me as I crossed a main road without paying attention. Surprised, I dropped the books, scattering them under the streetlight at the corner. As I bent down to gather them, mixing my books and papers with Ibrahim's, I tried to sort them out.

A paper from Ibrahim's documents caught my attention. As I was placing it back, I noticed the report's title... a report on "Hassan Al-Saleh's" movements and

practices. My curiosity peaked, I quickly gathered the rest of the papers, allowing myself to read what was written in that tightly sealed intelligence report carried by Ibrahim and signed "Your brother (23)." So, Ibrahim and his group's activities extend beyond student activism, party rivalry, and mosque prayers.

Ibrahim was unusually late that night, causing my mother to worry. I reassured her by jokingly saying he'd be fine, but inside, I wondered what danger he could possibly be in. My mother, with tears welling up in her eyes, expressed her deep concern, insisting that a mother's intuition is never wrong. I watched as her worries couldn't be easily dismissed.

After performing the Isha prayer, my mother sat on the prayer rug for nearly three hours, visibly anxious until Ibrahim finally returned home. She immediately questioned him about his whereabouts and his late return. Trying to lighten the mood, Ibrahim jokingly asked if she preferred a written or oral report. However, his attempts to calm her failed as she pressed for answers. Eventually, Ibrahim explained he had been helping a friend resolve a problem, but my mother was not easily convinced, warning him not to stay out so late again.

While observing their interaction, I knew I had to confront Ibrahim about the report I accidentally read. Once my mother went to bed, and after Ibrahim prepared his own meal, I sat next to him, whispering my apology for reading the report on Hassan. Ibrahim was taken aback, unsure of how to react to my accidental discovery. I assured him his secret was safe with me, but inside, a storm of questions raged on.

The next day, Ibrahim insisted on accompanying me to university, using the opportunity to confide in me about his concerns regarding Hassan. I realized he was trying to divert my attention from the true origin of the report. I confronted him, making it clear I knew the report's information was too detailed for an ordinary observer. Our conversation shifted to what actions might be taken against Hassan, revealing Ibrahim's deep-seated intention to rid the community of Hassan's menace. Despite the gravity of his words, Ibrahim reassured me that everything would be handled in due time.

Ibrahim was saving up with my mother from the surplus of his earnings from his construction work. That day, when he returned from the university, he approached her requesting 1,500 dinars from those savings because he wanted to buy a car. This car would help him in commuting and in transporting his work tools, saving him time between work and study. I was aware that he was deeply

planning to end the matter with his brother Hassan. My mother gave him the money and informed him that there were still about another 1,500 dinars left. Ibrahim bought a Peugeot 404, a very popular and widely prevalent type of car in the sector, all of which were used and old, at least fifteen years, but by the standards of the camp, it was a luxury.

Mohammed leaves the apartment he rents with a group of students in Birzeit, heading to the university. Upon entering, he immediately notices that the atmosphere is tense, unusual as the students, both boys and girls, prepare themselves for clashes with the occupation soldiers as usual. They prepare piles of stones at different corners, ready their masks, and set up barricades, then they organized into a massive demonstration that marched out of the university, chanting against the occupation and settlement and for Palestine. It wasn't long before the occupation patrols arrived, and the clash began. The soldiers took cover behind their vehicles, and the students retreated behind stone walls. The stones rained down on the soldiers who began firing bullets and tear gas at the students.

All student forces participated in these events. In such instances, when all student forces participate, the clash becomes more intense and violent as the spirit of competition fuels the students' readiness for the clash and ignites their enthusiasm. The confrontations lasted several hours, forcing the soldiers to retreat several times while dragging one of their own bleeding from his head or face after being hit by stones. The soldiers began firing not just to disperse the protesters or to injure them, but with a clear intention to kill.

Within minutes, two students, "Jawad Abu Salameh" and "Saeb Dahab"... As usual, the students' fury was unleashed, and they began chasing the soldiers who were forced to retreat to the outskirts of the town, away from the university and the students. The bodies and the wounded were taken to Ramallah Hospital, and night had fallen... By morning, news of the martyrs and clashes in Birzeit had spread across the nation, igniting demonstrations in all areas, declaring a general strike, and extending confrontations between the protesters and occupation soldiers everywhere in the Islamic University.

The students erupted in massive protests, hurling their stones at the occupation patrols, and the events spread to the camp and across the city, especially the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood where martyr "Saeb Dahab" resided, as well as to the south of the sector, especially Khan Younis, where martyr Jawad Abu Salameh lived.

The events continued over the following days. With stones being thrown at the occupation patrols stationed beside the university and passing by it, a large force from the occupation army arrived and besieged the university. It was clear they intended to discipline us to become "good and calm boys." Hundreds of soldiers surrounded the university and attempted to storm it multiple times but retreated every time before the flood of stones raining down on them. Time passed until evening approached, making it apparent that we would have to spend the night in the university.

However, a vehicle carrying some dignitaries was allowed into the university, and they negotiated with the student activists and university officials. They informed them that the military governor did not object to the students leaving the university in specific groups of ten every five minutes, so as not to cause a gathering and extend the protests into the city. They were assured that the soldiers would not harm any of the students. Everyone agreed to this, and we began to exit in groups of ten, with the soldiers directing the movement to one of the side streets, with each group followed by the next.

I was in one of the groups, and when we reached a fork in that street, the soldiers directed us to turn, and we found hundreds of soldiers standing with their batons, and their vehicles blocking the street, turning it into a detention camp. Under beatings, we were forced to sit, squat on our knees with our hands over our heads and faces towards the wall, after taking our ID cards for verification. It seemed they had lists of activists' names as they sorted them into a nearby area under beating and kicking, then allowed the rest to leave after returning their ID cards. I was not classified as an activist for any of the student forces. I took my ID and fled from the place...

Ibrahim was detained along with about a hundred other students for three days, where they were severely beaten and subjected to unimaginable humiliation. The military governor thought he had disciplined us and taught us a lesson to become "good smart kids."

Several days later, upon entering the university, it was immediately clear that conflict was imminent. A group of activists, led by Ibrahim, were preparing for confrontations. Once the students gathered, stones began to rain down on the patrols and military vehicles passing by the university. Within half an hour, the university was surrounded, and military buses began to amass hundreds of soldiers... It was evident that this time, the beating we were to receive would be

multiple times what it had been previously. But, every incident has its own narrative – it was time for a confrontation, and we were ready to face it as needed.

The majority of students masked themselves to avoid the cameras and binoculars mounted atop a high-rise building opposite us, and stones began to rain down on the soldiers hiding behind their vehicles and plastic shields, who responded with gunfire and tear gas. It was clear that the students were seeking revenge for the beatings received days before. A large armored vehicle was brought in to spray hot water; it approached the university's gate and, despite being pelted with stones, managed to break through the gate and advance towards us. We countered with a heavy barrage of stones.

The soldiers couldn't advance alongside it, so the vehicle retreated, and the situation became a back-and-forth of attacks until the afternoon. Then, the sound of a military tank tearing through the ground and breaking through the university's back gate was heard. A student screamed through a loudspeaker: "A tank has breached the university from the back gate!!" Suddenly, more than seven hundred students turned towards the tank instead of fleeing, racing towards it in a scene close to madness. There was a clear understanding among the tank's crew that they would be crushed under its tracks by dozens, but they were confident that the mob climbing atop the tank would tear them apart.

The tank turned around and exited the university. The crowd reached the torn gate and began to seal it with whatever they could find – stones, concrete blocks, barrels, and tree trunks. Most of them returned to monitor the soldiers from the wall.

As evening approached and the mediators came for negotiations, their attempts were rebuffed with harsh words. We waited, wondering what would come next. Ibrahim tried to hide a wide smile unsuccessfully. The situation calmed slightly when suddenly, the loudspeakers of dozens of mosques across Gaza City blared in unison, screaming for jihad... "The occupying soldiers are surrounding your sons and daughters in the university. Come out to rescue them. God is the greatest... God is the greatest."

The community from every neighbourhood started to gather, forming massive protests from all directions towards the university. The entire city of Gaza had erupted in chants of "God is the greatest. God is the greatest and death to the occupation." A state of security chaos prevailed, and immediately orders were given for the forces surrounding the university to disperse and secure the city.

The forces turned and spread out, only to be met by throngs of angry people in front and thousands of enraged university students behind, feeling victorious... Ibrahim exited the university in his car, saw me, and stopped to take me with him. He said he wasn't heading home but wanted to take a tour of the city to observe the situation. The city was alive; men, women, children, and elders were out on the streets, burning tires everywhere, barricades closing off roads, and groups of panicked soldiers were spinning around, clueless about what was happening around them.

Ibrahim's smile was broad, and he made no effort to hide it now. "God be praised, the people are fine, thank God," he continued, noting the thousands of citizens and students heading towards the military governor's headquarters, pelting it with tons of stones while the soldiers couldn't protect their heads or shoot indiscriminately.

A few of Mahmoud's friends came over for a visit, clearly concerned. They sat down, and shortly after, I served them tea prepared by Mahmoud's wife. They continued their conversation, discussing a young Fatah member who had recently been arrested and was responsible for one of the specialized military groups. He had confessed to everything during interrogation. Mahmoud asked how that was possible, having heard that the young man was strong and stubborn. One of them explained that although he was indeed resilient, he had been taken to "the birds" (a slang for informants or spies used in interrogation) and there he confessed. Curious, I interjected, asking what "the birds" were. They explained that these were a large group of spies who assist in interrogations by pretending to be patriotic prisoners in regular jails. They attempt to extract information from detainees who the intelligence services have been unable to break.

The pretext they used was the need to extract information for the officials, fearing the arrest of the cell, or for any other reason. Sometimes, when they see a detainee defending himself as respectable and not an informant, they continue to accuse him. Thus, some detainees feel compelled to reveal their secrets to prove they are not informants, falling victim to such tricks and deceptions.

At the Islamic University, there's a complete separation between male and female students, each studying in their dedicated sections without any mixing. However, when going to and from the university, they meet in the streets, parking lots, and bus stops, where most adhere strictly to public decorum, even going above and beyond in compliance. Despite this, a few students might interact more freely once outside the university premises. Female students are required to wear the

hijab as per the university's rules, with the majority wearing it sincerely due to the conservative nature of Gaza's populace. Some, however, wear it only upon entering the university and remove it or push it back once they leave, revealing parts of their hair.

One of the girls from my neighbourhood, who attended the university, often crossed my path to and from the institution. Without exaggeration, she was truly as bright as the full moon. Occasionally, I would steal glances at her as she walked, her gaze fixed to the ground, heading towards her destination without a hint of hesitation. Gradually, I found myself drawn to her, too shy and fearful to even greet her.

One day, our eyes met, sending a shiver through my body and stirring deep emotions within me. After that brief exchange, I started timing my walks to coincide with hers, feeling a sense of comfort just by being on the same street. I began to wonder if this was love, the emotion often spoken about. When our eyes met again, my heart raced at the sight of her. On the third occasion, her smile and the flush of her cheeks as she hurried away left an indelible mark on me.

Eventually, I was content just to watch her from a distance, not daring to hope for more than that. It sufficed to know that I had loved and that she understood it well, especially as she sensed my eagerness to see her every other day. I knew I had to cherish this feeling without seeking more, at least until I graduated and was in a position to propose to her properly, as I was raised.

My cousin Hasan's situation was a constant worry for Ibrahim, who had filled my head with concerns more than once. He took me along to monitor Hasan's movements to verify the information in the report. We confirmed several details; we saw him meet with "Abu Wadi'", park his car near the headquarters, enter the Saraya showing a special ID to the guards, and disappear for hours. We observed his frequent visits to well-known collaborators' stores and his disgraceful harassment of women on the streets. It became clear that Hasan was involved in morally corrupt activities, leaving no room for doubt or interpretation.

My mother was strict about us not staying out late. If one of us tried to sneak out, thinking she was asleep or busy, she would immediately question where we were headed. Ibrahim knew this would complicate his plans regarding Hasan, so we agreed to return home early, study, and sleep, then sneak out around midnight. This plan went on for weeks until one night Ibrahim returned troubled, changed,

and went to bed without speaking. After that night, he never involved me in any mission to monitor or follow Hasan again.

About a week after that night, Ibrahim told me, "Ahmed, there's no need to stick to that schedule anymore. Take it easy and do as you wish." I found this odd but didn't question his reasons. On one of the following nights, as I was returning home late, I took a detour and noticed the car of the intelligence officer "Abu Wadi'" parked by the roadside. He was standing next to it, dressed in civilian clothes as usual, pointing at something on the wall of the mosque. I veered into an alley to avoid running into him and waited until he left. Then, as I passed the spot where Abu Wadi' had been, I noticed he had marked the wall with symbols and some numbers.

When I got home and entered the room, I found Ibrahim reading one of his university textbooks. I told him what I had seen, and he looked at the clock, commenting that if it weren't so late, he'd have gone out to see it himself, but he didn't want to risk our mother's wrath for leaving at such an hour. We decided to wait until dawn to go for the morning prayer. Before reaching the marked wall, Ibrahim cautioned me not to point or make any gestures, but to talk to him about it without indicating it physically. He saw the markings clearly as we approached.

After we passed, he whispered, "There are many such markings in various places. I thought they were municipal markers for sewer or electrical services, but they're actually for intelligence, meaning they're for very secret and dangerous operatives, as known agents wouldn't require such elaborate methods." We prayed at dawn and took another look at the markings on our way back, with Ibrahim muttering to himself about deciphering the day, hour, and location from them.

That afternoon, Ibrahim took me for a drive, instructing me to jot down certain details. We circled the streets, slowing down at walls marked with similar symbols, compiling dozens of them. After the evening prayer, we returned home where Ibrahim compared the numbers, concluding that they matched dates, hours, and possibly minutes—essentially a code for intelligence meetings with their agents.

I took this opportunity to broach a subject I had long held back on, suggesting we use his "device" on this information. His sharp look of anger made it clear he didn't appreciate the reference to the sources of the report on Hasan. Despite our previous agreement to leave the matter behind, I realized I didn't actually know

what I wanted from this conversation. We went to sleep after Ibrahim thoroughly destroyed the notes, leaving the matter unresolved.

The Thorn and the Carnation

Part II

Yahya Al-Sinwar

Chapter Eighteen

I was deep in sleep when I awoke to the sound of men causing a commotion in the house. I rubbed my eyes and looked at my watch; its hands pointed to three-thirty before dawn. I heard my mother's voice screaming: "What do you want?" Before Ibrahim and I could rise from our bed, the door to our room was struck with such force that it flew open, and several gun barrels were brandished and aimed at us. Then came the voice of Abu Wadih: "Don't move; stay where you are."

He entered with a number of soldiers and pointed at Ibrahim, saying, "You are Ibrahim?" Ibrahim responded, "Yes, I am Ibrahim. What do you want?" Abu Wadih laughed and said, "Why the hurry?!! Take your time, Ibrahim." He looked at me and asked, "You are Ahmad?" I replied, "Yes." He said, "Get up and come here." He took us and stood us against one of the walls. The soldiers were ordered to search, and they ravaged the room, digging through everything. Abu Wadih himself searched us personally but found nothing on us. The soldiers turned the room upside down but didn't find what they were looking for. He flipped through Ibrahim's papers and notebooks, reading what was inside them. Then, he gathered all the documents he was suspicious of, placing them in a box that one of the soldiers had brought and ordered it to be taken to the car.

My mother was screaming, "What do you want? You've wrecked the house, may God guide you!" Dozens of soldiers searched every corner of the house. After about two hours of searching, they tied my hands behind my back, placed a cloth blindfold over my eyes, and did the same to Ibrahim. They took us from the house while my mother screamed, "Where are you taking them? You criminals, may God curse you." They threw me into a jeep as one would toss a sack of potatoes, then I felt another sack of potatoes thrown on top of me, and I knew it was Ibrahim.

I was shivering from intense fear and worry. Ibrahim must have felt it because he whispered, "Hang in there. What's the matter with you, man, shivering? There's nothing!! It's just a matter of days, and we'll be back home." Then a strong slap landed on the back of his head, and a soldier screamed in broken Hebrew, "Shut up, donkey." The convoy moved and then stopped. We guessed we had arrived at the barracks. They took us out, pushing and kicking, then dragged us through

narrow alleys and corridors, and then up a long, narrow staircase. A man who spoke better Arabic took charge of me, asked me to stand still and not move. He placed me against the wall, and I heard him do the same with Ibrahim, asking him for the same.

A long time passed without anyone speaking to me. All I heard were the sounds of doors opening and closing, and voices speaking in Hebrew, which I did not understand. After a long while, the owner of the voice dragged me, saying, "Come," and pushed me into a room. He lifted the blindfold from my eyes. I found myself in a small room with a desk, behind which sat a young man in civilian clothes, smiling and saying, "Please, have a seat," gesturing to a chair in front of him. I sat down, my hands still tied behind my back. He asked, "Where is Hassan?" I looked at him in surprise and answered, "At home?" He asked, "Which home?" I said, "Our home." He exclaimed in surprise, "Hassan is in your home?!" I said, "Yes."

He looked at the papers in front of him on the table and then asked, "Which Hassan is that in your home?" I said, "My brother, Hassan." He said, "Ah, I'm asking about Hassan, your cousin. Where is he?" I said, "I don't know." He asked, "How do you not know?" I said, "He hasn't lived with us for many years, and we don't know where he goes or what he does." He asked, "When did you last see him?" I said, "I don't remember." He asked, "Approximately?" I said, "Years ago." He asked, "And when was the last time you mentioned him at home?" I answered, "I don't remember." He asked, "Approximately?" I said, "A very long time ago, we have forgotten about him." He asked, "Why?" I said, "He caused us a lot of problems with the neighbours, and we expelled him from the house. We no longer care about him; he means nothing to us."

He asked, "Have you heard that he was beaten about a year ago and stayed in the hospital for about two months?" I said, "I heard." He asked, "Who beat him?" I said, "How would I know?" He said, "What's your guess?" I said, "I don't know, but it could have been the family of one of the girls he was chasing or people he had a dispute with over something." He asked, "Like who?" I said, "I don't know, but that's what I thought at the time, and he really doesn't matter to us." He said, "So, you don't know where he is now?" I said, "Yes, I don't know, and I don't want to know."

He called the man who had brought me in and asked him to take me out of the room. He put the thick cloth sack back over my head, pulled me out of the

room, and placed me next to the wall. Then I heard them dragging Ibrahim in and shutting the door forcefully behind him.

After what could have been an hour, I heard the investigator call for that man, "Abu Jamil," so he went to him, and I heard him pulling Ibrahim out and standing him next to the wall. I guessed he asked him the same questions. I wondered to myself why they were asking about Hassan. Where is he? Is he missing, or is he running from them? I remained in that state, standing with my face towards the wall, receiving a slap or a kick that made me forget my fatigue and exhaustion.

My legs could no longer support me, so I collapsed to the ground, sitting. The soldiers came, hitting, screaming, and kicking, demanding that I stand up. The fatigue and exhaustion had overwhelmed me to the point where I no longer cared about the beating and kicking. They struck me repeatedly to make me stand, but I would not stand willingly. Each time they lifted me by my shoulders and stood me up, I would collapse back to sitting, and they would beat me again and lift me, only for me to return to sitting. Eventually, the investigator came and ordered them to leave me on the ground. True, I paid a heavy price for my sitting, but I felt immensely relieved.

Life surged in the interrogation section (the torture chamber) suddenly as dozens of investigators entered all at once, indicating it was daybreak and the start of their new workday. After a while, they took me to one of the rooms, and when they removed the sack from my head, I found myself in front of about seven investigators. Before I fully grasped my surroundings, one of them kicked my legs forward, and another pushed me in the chest backward, causing me to tumble towards the ground. They caught me and laid me down. The iron of the handcuffs dug into my back, and they pounced on me—one on my chest choking me, another stood on my stomach and began stomping on it with his feet, the third separated my legs, and the fourth started pressing on my testicles.

As the minutes of this ordeal passed, they would stop all at once, and the one sitting on my chest would ask, "Where is Hassan?" I answered, "I don't know," and they would start again. Then they would stop, ask the same question, and I would give the same answer, and the cycle would repeat. Then he would stop and ask, "Ibrahim, confess what happened? Where is Hassan?" I answered, "I don't know," many times until they were convinced I did not know where he was, and they left me. They called the soldier outside to take me away; I was placed next to the wall where I sat. He tried to pull me up and beat me, but I had resolved my situation since the previous night.

I heard Ibrahim's screams and their yelling at him. They seemed to be using the same methods on him. Ibrahim was denying any knowledge of Hassan's whereabouts, but he was responding sharply and cursing at them, which led them to increase the pressure on him. However, in the end, they took him out and placed him next to the wall. After a few days, they put me in a car, blindfolded, with my hands tied behind my back and my legs bound, and the car drove off for about an hour before stopping. They pulled me out, and I stumbled every time we passed steps or doors. They stopped me for a while next to a wall, then pulled me a short distance. I heard the sound of an iron door opening, and they pushed me inside a cell with black walls as they lifted the sack from my head.

Sitting in the cell, after a while, the door opened, and another young man was pushed into the cell after they removed the sack from his head. He sat next to me and, after a bit, introduced himself by his name and where he was from, mentioning he had been under interrogation for two months. They brought us our lunch and dinner, and after we ate, we heard noise. The door opened, and five young men wearing brown prison shirts were pushed into the room. They were being beaten with batons as they tried to defend themselves and retaliate. The young man sat down, and they began to introduce themselves, mentioning their very high sentences and that they had been in prison for ten years for discovering an informant and attacking him with razor blades, which led the police to punish them.

Then they asked for our names and why we were there. The young man with me started to share his story and what he hides and what he reveals, while they asked him to lower his voice, assuring him they would relay this information to the revolution outside the prison to take precautions. Then they turned to me, asking for details. I remembered Mahmoud's friends talking about "sparrows," and I was sure it was a trap to find out what I had, but the truth was I had nothing to hide.

I answered them very briefly as they probed to see if I was hiding anything. After a long while, the door opened again, and the guard called for me. He put the sack over my head, pulled me out, and then put me in another cell. I was sure they were now reporting back to the investigation officer about me.

Later, a policeman took me to the interrogation room where one of the investigators told me that they had confirmed I was not hiding any information, but they would detain me for three months in administrative detention, and my interrogation was over. The guard took me a distance away, brought me to the clothing store, and handed me the complete set of items given to every prisoner,

then took me to a section of the prison with several rooms housing dozens of prisoners.

It was a completely normal prison life. The prisoners welcomed me warmly, got to know me, led me into one of the rooms, arranged my bed and belongings, prepared tea for me, and readied the bathroom. I showered, rested, and had my meal. In the evening, they all sat down, including me, to get acquainted. They celebrated my arrival and treated me with great honor. At the end of the celebration, the room's leader came to me and informed me not to discuss my case with anyone. The next day, the organizational and security officials would come to explain everything to me. It was strictly forbidden to talk about this matter with anyone else.

The next day, the two officials came. We sat together in a corner of the room. They introduced themselves and mentioned they knew my brother Mahmoud, my cousin Hassan, and our neighbour Abdul Hafiz, along with other information that made me trust them completely. Then they started asking me about my case, why I was being interrogated, and why I was arrested. I explained in detail that I was arrested for no reason I knew of, and they kept asking me about my cousin Hassan, whom I didn’t know the whereabouts of nor understood why they were asking about him! I mentioned that Hassan doesn't live with us anymore; we expelled him from our home years ago and don’t know where he is or follow his news. They repeated their questions many times, then thanked me and left.

After a few days, the jailer called me by my name, took me to the storage room, took back the items they had given me, and returned my belongings and clothes, informing me that I was going to be released. They took me to the prison door and left me outside. Breathing the fresh air again, I couldn't believe I had been released and was still wondering about Hassan. Why were they asking about him? What was this investigation for? I couldn't find an answer.

When I reached home, the news had already arrived, and my mother came rushing to greet me with ululations of joy, and the neighbours came to congratulate me and thanked God for my safety. I asked my mother about Ibrahim. I said, "I don’t know; he was with me in the early days of the investigation, then I didn’t hear anything about him." I told my family what happened to me. A week later, while we were sitting at home in the afternoon, there was an eager knock at the door. It was the voice of al-Bashir saying, "Ibrahim has been released." We jumped up to greet him amid ululations and congratulations from every direction.

He asked me what happened to me, and I told him. He shared what happened to him during the investigation, which was almost exactly what happened to me. At night, when we were alone in our room, I asked him what happened and what it all meant. He said, "I don't know, but it seems Hassan is either running from them or is missing!!" I asked if he knew that those who came to him were spies and that it was a trap to find out what he knew. He laughed and said, "That wasn't the trap, Ahmad." Surprised, I asked, "What then?" He explained, "That known trap is there so you fall into the real trap. They know we've heard about traps and spies in interrogations. So, they set an obvious first trap for someone to discover and be wary of, swelling with pride that he has fooled them. Then, they take him to that section to get entangled there; that's the real trap." I asked, "You mean the section and those in it are spies, and they are...?" He interrupted, saying, "Yes, yes." I thanked God that I had no information to hide because I would have told them everything since I had no suspicions of them.

Ibrahim shared that when he was with them and denied any knowledge of the situation, it seemed they sensed his suspicion of them. They threatened him, suggesting they believed he might be an agent or a spy, and announced this in the room, imposing a state of emergency on him. They began to treat him as if he were a spy, intending to provoke a reaction that would lead him to defend himself. To prove he was not a spy, they expected him to start revealing any secrets he had. They even brought him documents signed by officials from the movement, complete with red seals, encouraging him to speak truthfully and not hide anything. He assured them he was being truthful, which was that he had absolutely nothing to hide, and if he had spoken about anything, he wouldn't have been released from prison for years.

I looked at him closely and asked, "But you haven't told me where Hassan is?" He answered indifferently, "Forget about that matter. The important thing is he won't bother us, tarnish our reputation, or trouble anyone anymore." I realized he had fulfilled his promise and thanked God internally that I had never been privy to his secret or involved in his actions, as I might have been implicated and caused trouble for both myself and my cousin.

At the first opportunity after my release from prison, I went out early, waiting to see "Intisar," my beloved, and to be seen by her, hoping that if she had heard of my arrest, she would be reassured of my safety upon seeing me. I caught a glimpse of her emerging from the alley. She glanced at me, a fleeting look, then averted her gaze, and her lips murmured what I believed to be "Alhamdulillah"

(Thank God), or perhaps I just convinced myself of that. So, she must have known I was in prison and here she was thanking God for my safety. I was overwhelmed with indescribable happiness and raced ahead to the university so she could see me and be sure of my safety.

One evening, after Ibrahim's release, while we were sitting in our room studying for our university courses, our mother entered the room, greeting us as she carried a tray with three glass cups and a teapot. She pulled the table towards Ibrahim's bed and sat on the edge of the bed, leaning back next to her. She poured the tea, handed each of us a cup, and took long sips from her own, saying to Ibrahim as part of her conversation, "Look how beautiful the children of Mahmoud, Hassan, Fatima, and Tahani are. A son is the most precious thing in the world, and you only understand that feeling when you have a child of your own. Oh, how beautiful it is to become a mother or a father. These are the most beautiful feelings and emotions in the world."

I realized she was segueing into another topic, so I shot Ibrahim a stealthy glance. He caught my sly look and responded with a light smile, as if to say, "I understand what your mother is hinting at."

Seemingly realizing she had extended the introduction, she said, "Ibrahim, I want to marry you off and celebrate your wedding." He laughed heartily and responded, "It's not a problem, my aunt, may God keep you for us, our blessing. But don't worry about me; I won't do anything harmful or dangerous. I'm still young, and it would be better after graduating from university, God willing." She replied sharply and angrily, "I will marry you off, meaning I will marry you off. And why wait until after graduation when you have around two thousand dinars with me, which is more than enough for your wedding." He tried to interject, "Auntie..." She cut him off, "Be quiet, the matter is settled. You're going to get married, meaning you're going to get married. The important thing now is who you will marry. Tell me, and I will handle the rest. Do not argue with me about it," and she nudged him several times in the side, implying it wasn't the time for this discussion as it was still too early and premature. She asked if there was a particular girl he wanted. He looked surprised and said, "No, I told you I haven't thought about anyone." And she left the room with the tea tray.

Seeing an opportunity to gauge his stance on a sensitive issue, I asked, "Do you truly not want to get married?" He said, "The thought never crossed my mind before your mother entered the room, and I hadn't considered it before." I asked, "And now?" He reiterated, "I think it's not the time for this matter, it's still too

early and premature." I pressed, "Honestly, is there someone you love?" His surprise grew, "Someone I love?! What are you talking about, man?" I prodded, "So you mean to say you don't love anyone?" He countered, "Who said I love to begin with, for me to deny it?"

I asked, "And you've never loved at any time?" Seeking honesty, he admitted, "This is a complicated and lengthy topic. About five years ago, I saw a girl and felt that I loved her. I began to watch her come and go and felt that I loved her and she reciprocated my feelings. The matter didn't develop beyond that, but when I started praying and attending the mosque regularly, I understood that such relationships are prohibited before seriously considering marriage. So, I stopped watching her path, yet I felt my heart was still attached to her and adored her, and I don't think there's any religious issue with that."

"But after Hassan's return and his stay in the camp, the troubles he caused, and my involvement in political life, feeling that I became part of the national concern, the concern of this country and its sanctities, I thought it over and decided that I should even stop thinking about love. It seems, Ahmad, that we are supposed to be deprived even of this feeling... just the feeling."

He was speaking from the depths of his soul, as if undergoing a rebirth after labor pains. I wondered if he was exaggerating. To my knowledge, revolutionaries are often lovers and poets. He laughed and said, "That's true, that's true, Ahmad, but not among us, not in the Palestinian people. That's true for revolutionaries in Vietnam, Cuba, and People's China, but it seems our destiny is to live with only one love: the love for this land, its sanctities, its soil, its air, and its oranges. It appears this land refuses any rival in our hearts, competing with the love young men may have for anyone else."

I laughed and said, "Indeed, you've combined all three: a revolutionary, a lover, and a poet. What you've just described is poetry, a paean to your jealous beloved. But I don't believe this conflicts with loving one of the beautiful girls; loving them is part of loving the homeland." He sighed and said again, "Do you want the truth, Ahmad?" I replied, "Nothing but." He said, "As the saying goes, 'In this land, the wicked have left nothing for the righteous.' Ahmad, the occupation has contaminated everything: our land, our sea, our streets, and even our souls. How many love stories have I heard that started passionately in this country and ended up as tools for the occupation to whip the backs of lovers, using this noble, sacred relationship at the hands of collaborators to pressurize lovers into betraying their first love (Jerusalem)? Is there room left in our lives for love and passion?" I

insisted, "I'm sure you're exaggerating and confusing your religious beliefs and legal judgments with the practices of the occupation and its collaborators, resulting in a heavy, sharp blend of ideas." He smiled and said, "Who said that religious concepts can be separated from the reality of life and its interactions? Ahmad, I decided to cut this cord after I had loved a girl with all my soul and senses, even though my relationship with her remained within the bounds of the permissible and chaste. I loved her from the depths of my soul, and when this intense and sharp feeling of ideas pressed on me, I asked myself: Do I truly love her? And I answered myself with certainty. So, I told myself, if your love is sincere, then in the confines of our lives as Palestinians, you must devote yourself to a love that avoids all that could open doors to corruption and evil, anything that could tarnish the image or reputation of the beloved, and even stop the breezes that might touch the lover's face or play with her hair. We are not like others, Ahmad... We are not like others. Good night."

He went to his bed, pulling the cover over himself. I responded, "And to you as well," covering myself as I pondered every word he had said, wondering if he was truly exaggerating or if we are indeed not like others. Our story is not that of the Irish, the Khmer Rouge, or the Pakistanis. This is a Palestinian story, its complexity centreed around the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

This individual began walking towards me on the side road. My heart raced, fearing my rapid beats were audible to him. Rubbing my eyes for a clearer view, as he came under the streetlight about ten meters away, I recognized him. My breath caught; it was "Faiz," one of Ibrahim's close friends and activists. I thought maybe he was sent by Ibrahim for surveillance as well! But before I could further ponder this thought, a speeding car turned onto the side road, stopped, and opened its back door. Faiz got in, and the car sped off. I was utterly convinced it was the intelligence officer's car, "Abu Wadih," and I was almost certain that Abu Wadih was in the car, with at least a 95% certainty.

Conflicted thoughts swirled in my mind. Was this a dream? Was it reality? Was this a scene from a crime or spy movie? What should I tell Ibrahim? Should I tell him the truth, or conceal it, pretending nothing happened? Torn by these questions until Ibrahim's car arrived. As he drew closer, I checked the area, found it empty, emerged from behind the bush, got into the car, and we started driving back. He asked if anything happened, if I saw anyone, if the intelligence officer came. I remained silent.

Noticing my unusual state, he pressed, "What's wrong? What happened?" I replied, "You won't believe what happened," he urged, "What happened?" I said, "The man came, and Abu Wadih took him in his car." He exclaimed, "Really? Who was the man?" I said, "That's the problem." He asked, "What problem? Who was the man?" I said, "Faiz." He exclaimed, "Faiz!! Who?" I said, "Your friend." He yelled, "What are you saying? What? And no one else but him?" I confirmed, "Yes, it was him in flesh and bone. I saw him with my own eyes, 100% without a doubt." He asked, "Abu Wadih came and took him?" I affirmed, "Yes, Abu Wadih stopped his car next to him, opened the door, he got in, and the car drove off towards the settlements."

Ibrahim pulled over, slowing the car until he stopped, engaged the handbrake, turned off the car, and rested his head on the steering wheel, muttering, "Oh my God, what's happening here? I can't believe it, this is unbelievable... impossible..." repeating "impossible" countless times. I asked, "Why impossible?" He began to speak, then stopped abruptly, and continued, "Oh God, it seems I've lost my mind. Let's go home." I took the driver's seat and drove home in silence. As we neared our house, he asked me to head to Sheikh Ahmad's house, but before we arrived, he requested me to stop and wait far from the Sheikh's house until he returned.

He was gone for about half an hour and then returned. We headed home without either of us uttering a word. My sister, Mariam, served us dinner, but he barely ate a few bites. We drank tea, each holding a book, looking at it without seeing the letters.

After an hour, he looked at me and said, "Ahmad, I know you don't need reminding, but I must say, this matter is closed, and you must not tell anyone." I assured him, without a doubt. He continued, "We still can't be certain that it wasn't just a series of coincidences. We need to examine things to be 100% sure." I agreed, asking, "But how?" He said, "We'll see, we'll see. Good night," pulling his cover over himself. Then, turning towards me, he added, "If you meet him, you must not let on any change in your behavior." I assured him, "Understood." Each of us pulled our covers over and laid our heads on our pillows, tossing and turning in our beds as if they were made of coals.

When we got up for the Fajr prayer, he whispered in my ear, trying to smile, "Is it permissible for us, living this life and seeing what we see, to love and to be passionately in love, Ahmad?" That's when I decided to end my love story, if it

could even be called that, and I understood the meaning that our story is a bitter Palestinian one with room for only one love... one passion.

Chapter Nineteen

I noticed Ibrahim reading a Hebrew newspaper. I didn't know Ibrahim was well-versed in Hebrew, though he knew a bit of it. It was a "Yedioth Ahronoth" newspaper. I asked him, "What is this newspaper? And what's in it?" He said, "This is a Hebrew newspaper ('Yedioth Ahronoth'), and there's an article about the Gaza Strip." He gently pulled out the newspaper along with a translation of the article and handed it to me.

It was a lengthy article describing the situation in Gaza, summarizing that the Gaza Strip has turned into a quagmire of agents and spies dealing with the Israeli intelligence service, Shin Bet. Gaza, which was a hotbed of troubles and a headache for Israelis at the beginning of the occupation, could no longer stand up, nor could it ever return to that corner. Most of the article was attributed to intelligence sources and officials in the Shin Bet.

I read that with great concern, and Ibrahim, noticing my worry, smiled and said, "Worrisome, isn't it?" I said, "Definitely." He said, "All this is nonsense. Didn't you see how Gaza turned into a volcano when they surrounded the university and we mobilized people from the mosques?" I said, "True, but..." He cut me off, saying, "No doubt they have struck the resistance hard and infiltrated our society in a terrifying way. But this land is blessed; God has blessed it and its people. When the hour comes, the genie will be unleashed again, and these people will know which way to turn." I said, "Again, I see you're being romantic and imaginative. I don't think your theory is based on accurate information and statistics, but merely dreams and wishes." He smiled confidently and said, "You'll see, Ahmad, you'll see."

Three young men in their early twenties gathered in one of the houses in Rafah refugee camp, a few dozen meters from the border fence with Egypt, whispering on a mat made of old fabrics.

Abdel Hamid: "We must do something. We can't just wait like this without taking any action."

Khalil asked, "And what can we do?"

Fareed answered, "We can arrange for some old weapons and start working with them."

Khalil objected, saying, "No... we cannot use weapons bought from the black market. You know most of it is defective, involved in crimes, or leads to immediate arrest since those trading in it do so with the knowledge of the intelligence services to arrest those who think of acting against the occupation."

Frustrated, Abdel Hamid asked, "So what do we do? We must start working."

Khalil smiled, saying, "I have a good idea. We must try it."

On Saturday at eleven in the morning, numerous buses stop at Palestine Square in Gaza City, disgorging hundreds of Jews, both men and women. They begin to stroll around the city and its markets in groups, swaying, laughing, buying whatever they fancy, eating, and drinking. Omar al-Mukhtar Street in the bustling commercial area, stretching from Palestine Square to al-Shuja'iyya Square, is crowded with them speaking Hebrew and sometimes uttering a few words in broken Arabic, causing the vendors and themselves to laugh.

From the side of al-Mukhtar Street towards al-Shuja'iyya Square, "Khalil" loiters with a folded Al-Quds newspaper in his hand, a common sight among many young men from the camps. He looks at the shop windows and, gradually moving forward, finds one of those Jews a meter away on his right, passing by the metal barrier separating the sidewalk from the road. Suddenly, the newspaper falls from his hand, and a sharp kitchen knife appears in his grip. His hand, holding the knife, swiftly strikes the Jew's neck back and forth in a flash, cutting the throat and causing blood to pour out profusely as the man collapses to the ground.

Khalil then turns into a side street, and as soon as the people notice and start shouting, he gets into a waiting car driven by Abdel-Hamid, which quietly merges into the city's bustling traffic. Within fifteen minutes, a large force of occupation soldiers, intelligence, and police arrive at the scene, cordon it off, and begin the procedures of removing the victim's body, examining the place, and launching an investigation campaign among the shop owners and pedestrians. Not long after, a similar incident recurs in a nearby area.

Khalil sends a knife flashing towards one of the occupiers, forward and backward in a single motion, then the city's alleys swallow him up, vanishing with its sleepy air, while the occupation forces and intelligence raise hell, making arrests and conducting investigations, all in vain.

One evening, as I was sitting in my room studying one of my books, I heard a knock on the door. I got up to see who it was, and upon opening the door, I

found Fayez greeting me. I was unable to return the greeting as words stumbled in my throat, then I remembered what Ibrahim had said and returned the greeting.

He asked, "Is Ibrahim here?" I replied, "No, but he might arrive at any moment." He said, "No, I will return shortly. If he comes, tell him I will come to see him and he should wait for me." Then he left, and I went back to my study.

About half an hour later, there was another knock on the door, and Ibrahim had not yet returned. It was Fayez at the door. I told him, "Ibrahim hasn't returned yet, please come in." Having gotten used to the idea of talking to him, I called my family to clear the way, and he entered with me into our room where he sat on the edge of Ibrahim's bed. I began trying to engage him in conversation about something to pass the time and overcome the tension I felt.

I asked about his studies and his preparations for the upcoming exams. He replied that they were going well, and he was making good progress since the study material was easy and straightforward. Suddenly, he asked, "Do you know if Ibrahim will be late?" I said, "I don't think so." He said, "I don't want to stay too long. Does he often come home late at night?" I replied, "No, but sometimes he might be late." He asked, "Do you know where he might be now so that I can go to him there?" I said, "I don't know." He asked, "Doesn't he visit his brother Hassan?" My heart rate increased as I answered, "No, we don't visit Hassan, nor do we keep in touch with him, nor do we know anything about him for many years since we expelled him from the house for his bad deeds."

Fayez said, "But Hassan is his brother, and blood does not become water. He must be concerned about him." I said, "No... no, I haven't heard him mention his name since then. We have forgotten about him, and had you not mentioned him, we wouldn't have remembered." I asked, "But why do you ask about Hassan?" He seemed confused for a moment, then said, "I thought to myself, he might be with him so I could go see him there." Then he asked, "But where does he live now?" I said, "I don't know. We haven't seen him for a long time." He asked to leave, so I escorted him out of the house, and I returned to my room and my studies, which I could no longer understand anything from, wondering if he was assigned by the intelligence to inquire about Hassan with us. Otherwise, what's with all these questions about him?!

Ibrahim returned shortly after, and when I informed him of the situation, he laughed and said, "Excellent, excellent. Now we can see him, but he can't see us. Let him carry on with his mission, and we will make sure whether he works with

them or not." I asked, "How?" He replied, "Someone is watching him right now, keeping track of his every move and pause." I said, "Don't you see? I've been certain ever since I found that report with you that you have a security apparatus working on these matters." He looked at me angrily and said, "Ahmed, what's the point of this talk? Do you want the grapes, or do you want to quarrel with the gardener?" I laughed and said, "Just keep me in the loop on developments in this matter because I've been a fundamental part of it from the start." He said, "You have my word."

My mother entered carrying dinner and greeted us, to which we responded in kind. She placed it on the table and sat on the edge of Ibrahim's bed, saying, "Have your dinner." As we took our seats around the table, she wondered, "What's the news with our groom?" Ibrahim turned to her and said, "All is well, auntie, but let's not bring up this groom matter." She replied angrily, "Why not? You should know that I've started looking for a bride for you, as beautiful as the moon." He said, "Haven't we agreed to postpone this matter until after graduation?" She said, "Yes, yes, but I'm looking for you, and as soon as I find the suitable bride, we will engage her to you even before graduation." He said, "Auntie..." I intervened, trying to save him from the situation, "What do you think about him wanting a specific one and he loves her?" She looked at me mockingly, "Shut up, who asked for your opinion? And what do you know about men? Ibrahim wants a specific one and he loves her, how stupid. Shut up, boy, shut up." Then she turned to Ibrahim, saying, "I'm looking for you, Ibrahim, and I will take you soon to meet them." He said, "Auntie," but she interrupted, "You be quiet too," and left the room.

In the city of Hebron, after the Maghrib prayer, Sheikh Jamal stands among a number of young men in the mosque, teaching them religious matters, instilling the meanings of piety, encouraging them towards what is with Allah, and dissuading them from worldly life. Meanwhile, in another mosque, Abdul Rahman sits among a group of young men, discussing the same meanings. The Sheikh sitting next to the pulpit looked at his watch and began to prepare to stand for the call to prayer. The sound of the Adhan for Isha prayer echoed from the minarets of Hebron's mosques... Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest. After completing the prayer, Abdul Rahman gestured to his nephew, Abdul Rahim, with his hand that it was time to leave the mosque. Abdul Rahim went to meet his uncle at the mosque's door, and they set off, with Abdul Rahman saying, "Let's go, we don't want to be late; we don't have a car today to take us to the town." They walked through the streets of the old town, with its ancient stone houses.

In one of the alleys, a shout rose up, "Allahu Akbar, people, this is our house," to which a voice replied in broken Arabic: "This is not your house; this is my house. Leave from here." Abdul Rahman and Abdul Rahim looked into the alley and saw dozens of soldiers standing with their weapons drawn, protecting a number of settlers, men, and women, as they evicted the residents and threw their furniture out of the house. Whenever the Arab residents of the house tried to return, the soldiers aimed their weapons at them, while the settlers pushed, pulled, and screamed at them.

Abdul Rahim's step moved towards the alley, feeling an urge to act, but his uncle grabbed his hand and pulled him back sharply, saying, "Where to? And what can you do against those rifles?" Abdul Rahim looked at him reproachfully and asked, "Do we just pass by without doing anything?!"

His uncle replied, "My nephew, this is a problem that cannot be solved by impulsive reactions and quick responses. This is not the first house, nor the last, that settlers have taken over, nor is this the first or last family to be expelled from their home. You see that the eye is watchful, but the hand is short, and the issues require a fundamental solution."

Abdul Rahim, feeling overwhelmed, asked, "How? And when?" Abdul Rahman calmly responded, "Take it easy, my boy, for everything has its appointed time, and Allah's decree will come inevitably."

The next morning, the village children's noise rose up, and Abdul Rahim ran towards the door to see what was happening. His aunt called out to him, "Where to, Abdul Rahim?" He didn't answer and rushed out with the other children towards the west, where the sound of bulldozers and vehicles crushing the ground could be heard.

The children watched as the machinery leveled the ground, uprooted trees, and demolished some small stone houses. Many of the children screamed, "This is our land they're bulldozing," and ran back to the village, their voices growing louder, "The Jews are bulldozing our land, the Jews are uprooting our trees." With their voices, doors of homes opened, and people peered out, wondering what was happening, and then they walked towards the west.

One man ran towards the crowd, shouting, "Allahu Akbar, people... Allahu Akbar. What happened? What happened?" When he saw the bulldozers grinding his trees, he collapsed to the ground unconscious. A group of people gathered around him to help, and one shouted, "Bring water!" While some were

busy helping him, a few men approached the bulldozers, and a group of soldiers came forward, leading to an exchange that was almost like a dialogue of the deaf.

The men say, "This is our land; why are you bulldozing it?" The soldiers demand they go back, pointing their rifles at them. The men repeat their objections, and the soldiers push them, causing one of them, an elderly man, to fall. Another helps him up, while a third confronts the soldiers. The shouting escalates, and the cries grow louder. Then, the soldiers start beating the men with batons, and those who fall to the ground are kicked. The crowd begins to scream and chant Takbir. The soldiers start firing tear gas, dispersing the crowd. The boys start throwing stones, and the soldiers shoot above the heads of the protesters. The land is being eaten away, olive trees cut down and crushed under the treads of bulldozers. Abdul Rahim throws stones at the soldiers, and the shooting and gas continue, as does the work of the bulldozers until sunset. Then, the bulldozers and the forces guarding them withdraw, and most people leave except for a few elderly men and women, who lie down on the soil of their land, kissing it and pouring it over their heads, their weeping unceasing.

Ibrahim came to me saying, "God willing, today we will decisively and conclusively resolve the 'Fayez' issue." I asked, "How?" He said, "You just need to do your part, which is to monitor him for the next six hours. Here are the car keys. Be very careful not to let him notice you're watching him, or the whole plan will be ruined." I took the keys, saying, "Don't worry about it." He left, saying, "From this moment, begin surveillance." Immediately, I started scanning the crowds of students in the university square, looking for him. To my astonishment, I found Ibrahim walking with him. He started talking to him in a casual, non-serious manner before pulling him towards the university cafeteria. I watched them sit for about half an hour, then Ibrahim excused himself and left.

Fayez seemed confused and unsure of what to do next. Then he got up and left the cafeteria, wandered around the university for a bit, then left the premises. I hurried to the car and followed him from a distance to avoid detection. He walked along Thirty Street, heading east, glancing at the surrounding shops, examining something. Then, he entered one of the shops. I sped up the car to pass in front of the shop to see what he was doing inside. I saw him talking to the shop owner, seemingly asking permission to use the phone, which was granted. He made a brief call, thanked the man, and left.

I waited for him from a distance. He signaled to a passing car, which stopped, and he got in. I followed it until it reached Palestine Square. He got out of the car,

wandered around the square a bit, then headed to one of the car parks, talked to the driver, and got into the car that took him out of the square. The car then exited Gaza to the north. When it neared the turnoff where I had seen him get into "Abu Wadih's" car, I slowed down, then stopped and got out. He headed down that side road. I drove north, then turned around and came back, and so I went back and forth on the main road. Every time I passed the side road, I looked to find him still heading westward.

During one of those moments, I saw the intelligence officer "Abu Wadih" driving by, then slowing down and turning into that side road. I rushed towards the junction, and by the time I got there, Abu Wadih had already stopped his car, opened the door, and Fayez got in with him before they drove off. Unsure of what to do next, I wondered whether I should continue the surveillance or if my role had ended. Eventually, I drove down that side road and, from a distance, saw Abu Wadih's car entering one of the settlements. I turned around and went back to the main road, waiting at the junction about fifty meters from the turnoff. After about 40 minutes, Abu Wadih's car suddenly sped out, heading back to Gaza.

I followed and looked down the side street, finding Fayez on his way back to the junction. I quickly turned around and returned to my previous position. Fayez reached the junction, signaled to passing cars until one stopped, and he got in. I followed him; he got off at Palestine Square, then took another car to the camp and went home. I realized my mission was over and that I needed to inform Ibrahim of what had happened. I rushed home but didn't find him, so I hurried to the university and found him there. I told him everything, and he laughed so hard he almost fell over, saying, "He swallowed the bait, and now we're sure of his treachery, but we must complete the prank." Confused, I asked, "What bait? What prank?!" He said, "For days after you saw him that night, he hasn't missed a chance to ask me about Hassan. I realized that his current mission is to find any information I have about Hassan. So today, I told him I would meet Hassan at eight, whom I haven't seen for years, and that he had sent someone I didn't know because he wanted to see me urgently for a very important matter. I was sure he would rush to inform them of this significant information they were seeking. He swallowed the bait, and now we need to complete the act."

"I will go to a distant place as if I'm waiting for Hassan for a long time, acting nervous and anxious. I'll wait for an hour, constantly checking my watch like any worried person, then return home." Puzzled, I asked, "What's the point of that?" He explained, "Ahmed, they've arrested us, interrogated us, and took us to traps

to find out if we had killed him or knew his whereabouts. They didn't stop there but sent this traitor to dig around with us about him. They won't leave us alone until they're sure we have no connection to the matter and that we truly don't know where he is. This way, they'll stop chasing us, and we hit two birds with one stone: confirmed his betrayal and used it to convey information to them that would keep their harm away from us."

With astonishment overwhelming me, I said, "By God, you are trouble." He smiled, muttering, "That is grace from God." I asked if he needed anything more from me now. He glanced at his watch and said, "There's still time; I'll take you home before heading to my appointment." He drove me home, and on the way, he informed me that a group of youths affiliated with the Islamic Jihad, responsible for the recent knife attacks in Gaza, had been arrested. "Allahu Akbar, every cell that operates doesn't last more than a month before it's arrested. What a calamity," I exclaimed. He said, "As long as we have such traitors among our people, and as long as we, as organizations and political forces, are unable to fundamentally address this phenomenon, the situation will remain the same, if not worsen." We had reached the house by then. I got out, telling him not to be late. "If you're delayed past ten, I'll know something has happened to you," I said, and he drove off to make his appointment on time.

My brother Mohammed's fiancée was preparing for her end-of-semester exams and the conclusion of her university studies. Therefore, Mohammed made it a point to visit her family's home frequently to see if she needed any help with her studies. He prayed the Asr prayer at the nearby mosque, then headed to their house. When he knocked on the door, one of her brothers came out to welcome him and let him in. Her father and mother arrived, warmly receiving him, and then she came with her books and sat in the adjacent chair.

Her mother got up to prepare tea, and her father remained seated. She began asking about her study topics, and Mohammed answered her until the Maghrib prayer call. He prayed with her father while she and her mother prayed behind them. Then, he sat down to finish some explanations. After about half an hour, he said he had to leave for home. "Isn't it a bit early?" she asked. "No, you know the situation is unstable, and the country has become like a ghost town. I must get home before dinner to avoid any trouble with the soldiers, settlers, or any miscreants."

She nudged him on the knee as if to ask why he was hurrying. Her father said, "You're right, Mohammed. Your words are spot-on." Mohammed stood up to

leave, saying, "Peace be upon you." The man stood up to see him to the door, saying, "And upon you be peace, God's mercy, and His blessings. Take care." Mohammed left the house into the encompassing darkness and headed back to his apartment, walking along a deserted path with nothing alive but some stray cats and dogs in the early evening hours. All the shops were closed, and everyone had retreated to their homes, fearing trouble and headaches. Mohammed quickened his pace, heading home without many glances around or searches that might delay his return home.

Ibrahim returned home just before ten o'clock. After he entered the room, I asked him, "How did it go?" He said, "They swallowed the bait, and it seems we were 100% successful." I asked, "What happened?" He explained, "I went and waited, showing my nervousness and tension. I noticed there was heavy surveillance on me and the area. Even the cars, which seemed to be parked not too far away, appeared to have special forces ready to raid the place if anything happened. When nothing did, I returned without any interference, and they must be convinced that we know nothing about Hassan."

My mother entered the room, asking if we didn't want to have dinner. She was carrying a tray of food and placed it on the table, saying, "Peace be upon you." We replied, "And upon you be peace." She sat on the edge of Ibrahim's bed as we moved to eat. She said, "By God, Ibrahim, I have seen a bride for you as beautiful as the moon, and I will take you tomorrow to see her at her family's home." Ibrahim stopped eating and asked, "What are you saying?" I told him exactly what he heard, "Tomorrow, pray Asr and immediately come to take me to 'Abu Hussein's' house to see their daughter Salwa, a girl as beautiful in character and religion as one could wish for." He said, "Auntie...Auntie, didn't I tell you..." She cut him off, saying, "No more 'auntie this, auntie that'. The matter is settled, and you know Mohammed's fiancée will finish her studies in a week or two. We will have your wedding together just like we did with Mahmoud and Hassan. It's more economical, faster, and simpler." He said, "Auntie, I've told you before, I won't marry until I graduate." She replied, "You have a year left until graduation, and I won't wait a year. You will marry, you only have the right to choose the bride. Whether to marry or not is not your decision. And don't forget to come tomorrow right after Asr."

Resigned, he remained silent as my mother picked up the food tray. He sat on his bed in silence for a while, then suddenly called out, "Auntie! Auntie!" She came out from her room, asking, "What's the matter, Ibrahim?" He said, "Come here, I

need to tell you something." She sat beside him, asking, "What do you want?" He stated, "I won't be coming tomorrow after Asr. We won't go to 'Abu Hussein's' house, and I won't marry his daughter Salwa." She looked at him in utter astonishment and confusion. This was not the Ibrahim she knew. She exclaimed, "What are you saying? There's no need for that, Auntie." She asked, "What does that mean? Do you intend to break your word to me? Not listen to me? And not get married now?" He said, "No, no, I will marry, Auntie, whenever you want and however you want."

I shouted, "Didn't I tell you he's in love and has his eyes on a specific girl?" My mother looked at me with disdain, saying, "I told you to be quiet and not interfere." He said, "The truth is, Auntie, there is some truth in what he's saying, but things are not exactly as he describes."

She said, running out of patience, "I don't understand anything. Can you clarify what you want?" He lowered his head, saying, "I want to marry Maryam, Auntie." "Who's Maryam?" she asked. "Yes, my cousin Maryam," he replied. "Maryam," she repeated. "Yes, Maryam. And will I find anyone better than her? And do you agree to her marrying me?" Tears welled up in her eyes as she said, "And will we find anyone better than you, Ibrahim! Let me go see Maryam, Mahmoud, and Hassan," and she stood up to leave. I said, "And you don't want my opinion?" She replied, "No, I don't want your opinion on this matter. He's your soulmate, and your opinion is known."

I laughed and congratulated Ibrahim, "Congratulations, Ibrahim." He bowed his head, saying, "May God bless you, Ahmad. But let's see what the others think."

My mother left, and he turned to me, saying, "By God, I don't know what to do. We are in one valley and your mother in another. I don't want to upset her, and I fear getting Maryam involved with me and then getting imprisoned or..." He stopped, falling silent. "Continue, or what? Are you afraid of getting killed?" I asked. He quickly said, "No, no, but who knows what fate hides for us and what the days will bring."

My mother returned after a while, with Mahmoud and Hassan, all saying, "Congratulations, Ibrahim, congratulations." My mother added, "If it weren't the middle of the night, I'd ululate. My happiness is double, for you and for Maryam. But tomorrow, God willing, we'll do what's necessary." Then she called out, "Maryam, Maryam, come here." When Maryam didn't come, she stood up to fetch her and returned, dragging her in as Maryam tried to hide her face in

shyness until she entered the room. My mother pushed her, saying, "Sit next to your fiancé, your cousin." She sat down, her face exploding with shyness, and neither of them looked at each other.

Ibrahim boldly asked my mother, "Is Maryam agreeable, or did you force her, Auntie?" My mother replied, "Forced her! Why would I do that? And will she find anyone better than you?!" His face turned red again as he said, "I seek refuge in Allah. Could I find anyone better than her? By God, Auntie, I am embarrassed by your kindness towards me." My mother responded, "Our kindness towards you, my son? You're a man who made your own life. May God bless you." He paused, then said, "Auntie, is Maryam agreeable?" My mother assured, "Of course, of course, she agrees." He said, "I want to hear it from her." My mother told Maryam, "Say, Maryam, do you agree?" Maryam nodded in agreement, then she left as our laughter followed her.

They sat for a while talking about the engagement and wedding arrangements before excusing themselves to sleep early to tackle the many tasks awaiting them the next day. As they left, I whispered, laughing, "Enjoy your day, Uncle. From the start of the day, you're scoring successes, each bigger than the last." Laughing, he replied, "God willing, no envy. Good night." I responded, "Good night."

Here in Gaza's prison, in the same section where my brother Mahmoud had previously lived, in a room adjacent to his, after the jailer turned off the lights and went to sleep, one of the prisoners lay on his mattress by the door with a small piece of a mirror, extending it under the door to monitor the jailer's movements. The jailer approached and tapped his finger three times on the floor, prompting everyone to stick to their beds as if asleep, and the prisoner retracted his mirror.

The jailer reached the room door and shone his flashlight inside to check the situation, finding everyone seemingly asleep, he continued on to inspect the other rooms and then returned to his chair at the end of the section after completing his rounds.

The prisoner again extended his mirror, looked into it, and whispered, "Now," signaling with his hand. Three prisoners got up and entered the bathroom, one holding a saw blade wrapped in cloth for a good grip. Standing on his companion's back, he began to saw through the iron bar anew. The lookout tapped three times on the floor, and they quickly returned to their beds. The jailer made his rounds again and then returned to his chair, allowing them to resume their work.

Just before the dawn prayer, the mission was completed, and the window to freedom was opened. The jailer, struggling with sleepiness while seated on his chair leaning against the wall, and six of us hugged our comrades goodbye and descended from the window one after another, after arranging some tools in our beds to look like we were still sleeping. As the last one slipped out, the call to prayer for dawn began, "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar." They sneaked out of the prison, jumping over the outer wall.

At six o'clock, the jailers came to turn on the lights, and the loudspeaker announced it was time for the morning count... The counting officer came, they opened the room, and the count began. There was a shortfall. "Where are the others?" The inmates present smiled as the officer rushed to the toilet, then ran out sweating profusely, talking into his radio, just as the prison alarm began to sound.

Two and a half hours had passed since the young men left, ample time for them to have reached the far end of Palestine, not just a safe hideout in one of Gaza's neighbourhoods or its outskirts. A large number of jailers arrived to search and wreck everything in the rooms, while hundreds, if not thousands, of occupying soldiers set up checkpoints, stopping and scrutinizing everyone coming and going, a clear state of confusion and hysteria ensued.

By the time of the Asr prayer call, all arrangements had been made. My mother sent someone to apologize to Abu "Hussein's" family, explaining we would not be coming for the engagement because the boy only wanted his cousin. She informed my aunt, most of the neighbours, and sent me to buy baklava and to spread the word and gather everyone. After the Asr prayer, the house was bustling with people, ululations were heard, songs echoed, and baklava was distributed... Thus, Ibrahim's engagement to Maryam became known and publicly announced to both friends and strangers, removing any embarrassment Maryam might have felt in front of everyone.

Chapter Twenty

Unity Street in Gaza City at the junction of Fahmi Bek Street is crowded with people and cars. This place is a critical hub for the movement of thousands of Gaza's residents and hundreds of senior officers and officials from military, civil, and intelligence services.

The occupation's central headquarters in Gaza, located in the Saraya building, fills the street with vehicles. Without traffic lights to regulate the flow, the congestion becomes severe, forcing everyone to halt. The cars inch forward, meter by meter. An Israeli military police vehicle, driven by the commander of the military police in the Gaza sector, slowly advances, his arm resting on the car window while a Hebrew song plays on the radio with an unusual melody.

Among the crowd, "Mohammed," one of the young men who escaped from Gaza's prison weeks ago, steps forward. Reaching the vehicle, he pulls out a pistol, aiming it at the head and chest of the police commander, and fires several shots before disappearing into the crowd. A car waiting nearby quickly whisks him away from the scene.

Large military forces encircle the area, detaining people, closing shops, and engaging in beating, kicking, and destruction. Intelligence officers arrive to investigate the incident and gather information, which proves futile in apprehending the perpetrators.

Days later, a military jeep performing routine patrols on one of the city's main roads moves slowly. From behind a grave near the road, one of the young men who had escaped from prison days earlier appears. He pulls the pin of a hand grenade and throws it at the jeep, causing an explosion. He retreats from the location, leaving behind the screams of wounded soldiers.

Several days later, automatic weapons opened fire on a military vehicle, and its carriers withdrew without any complications. This news filled the occupied territories, echoing in every alley, house, and council, with everyone admiring the operations' level and the boldness of their executors, happy with the confusion that befell the occupation forces. This became the subject of one of the many gatherings at our house.

Days later, the sector woke up to bad news: the occupation forces and their intelligence had managed to capture two of the young men who had escaped from Gaza's prison, believed to be behind the recent operations. They were executed with thousands of bullets in an ambush set for them on a side road north of the Al-Bureij camp. The news reached the university; we suspended our studies and went out in a protest that clashed with the soldiers and spread throughout the sector.

On October 6, 1987, a few days later, and just after the Maghrib prayer call, another group of those young men and some of their assistants were moving in their cars through the streets of Al-Shuja'iyya neighbourhood in Gaza when they were attacked by several civilian cars that opened fire on them. Then, a large military force joined the attack, engaging with the young men, where they killed an intelligence officer supervising the operation and the ambush set for the mujahideen. The young men were all martyred, and a curfew was imposed on the neighbourhood.

Ibrahim came to me and informed me that they would rally everyone they could for Friday prayer at the Uthman Mosque in Al-Shuja'iyya. From there, a massive demonstration would emerge to commemorate the martyrs and honor their memory. He urged me to attend. A huge number of young men gathered in the mosque and performed the Friday prayer. The sermon and prayer were ordinary, ending with the worshippers beginning to exit the mosque. A group of activists gathered around Ibrahim and started chanting, "With our souls, with our blood, we will redeem you, Palestine... With our souls, with our blood, we will redeem you, O Martyr." People gathered around them in a massive demonstration that roamed the streets of Al-Shuja'iyya, passing by the homes of the martyrs' families and the mourning tents set up there. Whenever the procession reached one of those places, it stopped, and the chanting rose, greeting the martyrs and their families.

About forty minutes later, a large military force arrived, and clashes began with stones and empty bottles, continuing until the Asr prayer. This was the first time mass demonstrations in support of armed action emerged in the sector in such an unmistakable manner. Even my brother Mahmoud said when we gathered at the house that evening, "You are crazy. How can demonstrations emerge in this way, clearly supporting armed resistance?"

Mohammed's fiancée finished her studies and exams, and Mohammed returned from Gaza to arrange the wedding details. He had rented a special apartment in Ramallah and equipped it with everything necessary.

My mother wanted a wedding celebration in every sense of the word, without any shortcomings. However, Mohammed and Ibrahim desired a modest, small, and family-only event. The dispute intensified, and disagreements escalated. Mohammed wished for the wedding to take place in Ramallah, where the family and closest relatives could travel in two or three cars to Ramallah, conduct the ceremonies there, and end things simply. Ibrahim wanted it very simple at home for relatives and neighbours, to make my mother, my siblings, and our neighbours happy.

Mahmoud and Hassan were indifferent to the matter, believing the important thing was for everyone to agree. Fatima and Tania sided with my mother, and Maryam and I sided with Mohammed and Ibrahim. Eventually, it was decided that a not-too-large delegation from us would go to Ramallah for Mohammed's marriage contract with his bride, and to bring her and whoever from her family wanted to come back to Gaza for Ibrahim and Maryam's marriage contract, and to have a women's wedding celebration as they wished. The next day, Mohammed and his bride could travel back to Ramallah. Things went as planned without any issues or obstacles.

Before that, I had to move out of the room I shared with Ibrahim, which had been prepared for him and his bride, and temporarily live in the guest room. After the wedding, I moved in with my mother in her room. It became clear that the house could not accommodate three young couples, myself, and my mother. Engineer Mahmoud suggested building a second floor above the house and began to explain to us that this was possible from an engineering perspective, with some waiting, effort, and overcoming the challenges in the house. Ibrahim agreed with his ideas, considering them feasible and within his capability to execute. They agreed to postpone this project until two months after the wedding.

On the evening of Tuesday, December 8 of the same year (1987), while a bus carrying Palestinian workers returning from their jobs in the territories occupied in 1948 was heading south to Gaza City, having passed the Erez checkpoint, on the other direction of the road was a huge truck driven by a Zionist, tearing through the land, almost flying off the ground, heading north. As it neared the workers' bus, it swerved towards it and crushed it, killing several workers and injuring others. The deceased were taken to their homes, and the wounded to

hospitals. The news spread throughout the sector about a deliberate incident to kill the workers, causing thousands to take to the streets, talking and inquiring.

One of the young men sneaked into Sheikh Ahmad's house to inform him of the matter, asking for a suggestion on what to do simply. The Sheikh directed him to escalate the situation as the funerals turn into massive demonstrations and violent clashes with the occupation forces. The young man then set out to arrange what was necessary. As the funerals left Jabalia for Jabalia Camp, a massive crowd gathered behind them, chanting slogans and Takbir. The occupation forces arrived, and violent clashes ensued until midnight.

When Ibrahim returned home that night, he whispered in my ear that the Islamic University would be the epicentre of the protests tomorrow. They had arranged their matters, and in the morning hours, the Israeli radio announced the military governor of Gaza's decision to close the Islamic University for three days. Ibrahim set off in his car to different areas to inform activists to shift the focus of the demonstrations from the university to all areas and for each group of activists to ignite the situation in its area.

Indeed, by midday, the Gaza Strip, from its far north to its far south, was ablaze against the occupiers. Tens of thousands took to the streets in all areas in violent protests that clashed fiercely and angrily with the occupation forces. In every area, dozens of wounded were transported to hospitals or nearby clinics. With each new injury, the crowd's emotions and anger intensified, and in Jabalia Camp, the first martyr of the Intifada, "Hatem al-Sisi," fell.

On the second day, Thursday, the situation exploded from the early morning hours as dozens of masked individuals blocked roads, set up barricades, and stopped the movement of workers heading to work inside the territories occupied in 1948. The occupation forces rushed to open the roads for the workers. Every time they opened a road in one place, it was closed in another. The masked youths confronted the occupation forces with stones and empty bottles. By noon, massive processions carrying Palestinian flags and chanting for Palestine, the martyrs, and against settlement faced the occupation forces throughout the Gaza Strip.

An old man rushes into his house, barging into his son's room, who is still asleep even after ten in the morning. "You're still sleeping... Get up," he said. The young man, leaning on his elbow, looked at his father, puzzled, and rubbed his eyes, wondering to himself who woke him up to participate in the demonstrations and

clashes... My father? My father, who just days ago would tremble with fear upon hearing of any events against the occupation, would lock us in and prevent us from going out! What has happened in this world to cause such a drastic change?

The nearby mosque's loudspeakers blared the anthem "We swear by the mighty God to return you home... In the name of religion, Palestine shall rid of the betrayer... We've walked the path... We've faced the hard... We've crossed the borders... No matter the thorns... The bitter path for you to return home... For you to return home."

Hundreds of young men at every road intersection, or at the edge of each alley, masked themselves with keffiyehs they brought along, or even with their shirts, setting up barricades, igniting tires, and confronting the occupation forces. Their eyes shed tears, and their noses ran ceaselessly due to the tear gas. They quickly threw back the canisters at the soldiers who had launched them, making them taste the gas's sting and smell. Dozens rushed to carry one of them who fell wounded after being hit by a treacherous bullet, while the sound of gunfire from the soldiers was like that of a real battle, and the protesters' screams as one warns another or a third calls for help from a fourth. The mosque's loudspeakers continued to blast, infusing spirits with zeal.

When Ibrahim headed out in his car, I called out to him, asking where he was going with all the roads blocked by barricades, and that he wouldn't be able to pass! "Go on your errand by foot," I suggested. He looked back, smiling, and said, "Don't worry, Ahmad. Don't worry," and he drove off. I watched to see what he would do at the first barricade. As soon as he arrived and was seen by the demonstrators and those manning the barricades, they quickly opened a path for him, pulling aside the burning tires with long iron rods, curved at the head, prepared beforehand for this purpose. He passed the barrier and then another, as if he were the battle's leading commander, and perhaps he was.

That afternoon, a group of about thirty young men gathered. A patrol of about twenty occupying soldiers arrived. We immediately spread out at the heads of alleys, and as they reached the street centre among us, stones rained down on them. They began firing aimlessly in all directions.

Hundreds of locals, men and women, came out upon hearing the gunfire, and everyone joined in pelting the frenzied occupiers, who fired indiscriminately. The wounded fell, and the stone-throwing continued like rain, causing the soldiers to flee. One soldier, unable to escape because he was carrying a heavy radio on his

back, calling for help, attempted to fire more shots but couldn't. His legs could no longer carry him, and he collapsed to the ground, calling out to his mother (Ema) in Hebrew, meaning "Mommy, oh mommy."

Dozens of jeeps rushed to aid, colliding with protesters from every alley. After great effort, they reached and extricated their soldiers from the midst of the angry stones. Dozens, if not hundreds, of the wounded reached Dar Al-Shifa Hospital, some by ambulance and most by citizens' cars speeding off the road, doors flung open, with dozens hanging onto them alongside the injured. Thousands crowded at the hospital entrance to donate blood, rolling up their sleeves as medical staff pushed them back, screaming that this was far beyond our capacity and the hospital's ability to accommodate the raging sea of people at the entrance. The movement at the entrance became automatic every time a car carrying a wounded person honked and flashed its lights.

This raging sea chanted in unison for Palestine, the martyrs, and the wounded, against the occupation, its leaders, and its practices that neither scare nor deter.

Massive forces of soldiers advanced to the hospital area, launching unbelievable amounts of tear gas and live ammunition at the protesters. Thousands of stones rained down on the soldiers, increasing their gunfire. The crowd surged backward into the hospital, and a single voice roared, "Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar... Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews... Muhammad's army will return... In the name of Allah, Allahu Akbar... In the name of Allah, the time of Khaybar has come." The soldiers charged after them to the hospital entrance, only for everyone to surge forward again, the young men armed with stones in their hands. Faced with this torrent, the occupation soldiers retreated. One of them stumbled and fell; they attacked him with punches and kicks, stripped him of his weapon and military uniform, leaving him to run away in his underwear. Then they threw his weapon away after a wise one warned that keeping the weapon would lead them to kill a thousand of us, "Throw them their weapon."

The morale of the masses soared as they saw the myth of the Israeli army shattered by the raging Palestinian stones of anger. Stories of confrontations, martyrs, wounded, and heroics flew to every home and household, igniting in the youth and boys the spirit of sacrifice and martyrdom.

In the evening, Ibrahim met with Sheikh Ahmad at the Sheikh's house, where the Sheikh dictated the statement that would be printed and distributed in the mosques of the Strip for Friday prayers the following day.

Ibrahim set off with the original copy, and the hidden printing press in a shop disguised as an old tool store started producing thousands of copies. Each bundle was packaged and sealed, then loaded into Ibrahim's car trunk. On the main road, another car awaited to lead the way, ensuring they didn't run into any unexpected checkpoints.

The lead car flashed special lights mounted on its rear window as a signal to the following car, indicating when to stop or turn to avoid checkpoints. Since the lead car carried nothing illicit, it faced no issues at checkpoints. The two cars distributed the flyers, with Ibrahim dropping off bundles at mosques in various areas, hiding them in corners for someone to retrieve later and store until the next afternoon.

On Friday, 12/11, as worshippers finished their prayers and started leaving the mosques, they found piles of flyers on the ground, each weighed down by a stone. Everyone picked up a copy to read on their way home. Signed by the Islamic Resistance Movement and titled "And I, the Drowned, Fear Not the Drowning," the statement stirred the spirit of resistance and sacrifice among the people, urging them against the oppressive occupying forces. The people began to gather and crowd, with the call resonating louder, rallying the crowd against the occupation and in favor of Palestinian sacrifice against the Jews and their desecration of holy sites. Tens of thousands in each area took to the streets of cities and camps.

That day, we joined a demonstration from the camp's mosque that roved through the streets, then surged towards the main road. As the crowd neared the soldiers who opened fire, the people's enthusiasm and momentum grew, forcing the soldiers to retreat until the masses approached the Saraya compound. There, gunfire intensified unusually, and a helicopter overhead dropped large clouds of tear gas on the demonstrators. That day, it felt like most of Gaza City and its camp were nearly liberated, with the occupation forces confined to the Saraya building and its immediate surroundings, a scene mirrored across most of the Strip at the same time.

Balata Camp near Nablus was on the brink of eruption, long suffering under the provocations of Border Guard soldiers, mostly Druze, known for harassing women and girls in the area. The events in Gaza only fueled the anger further. After Friday prayers, a massive demonstration in Balata ended in fierce clashes with Israeli forces, a scene mirrored in Deheisheh Camp near Bethlehem. Birzeit University was also shut down by military order, leading many, including

Mohammad and his wife, to visit Gaza amidst the general strikes, fostering a sense of community and solidarity among visitors and residents alike.

The house buzzed with family members, recalling a time when they were crammed into a single room, their small family now resembling an army. Amid a lunch that resembled a feast, a long political debate unfolded about the utility of the ongoing disturbances, with opinions varying from skepticism to firm belief in their effectiveness. Mohammad viewed the actions as fleeting expressions of frustration, while Ibrahim saw them as a spark for lasting change. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's statements on Arabic Israeli TV, dismissing the Palestinian actions as futile, sparked further discussion. Ibrahim noted Shamir's acknowledgment of the Palestinian people as a sign of a significant shift, even as Mohammad tried to steer clear of the debate, focusing instead on his son, unwilling to concede or continue the argument.

During the night, a group of men led by Sheikh Ahmed decided to continue escalating the situation. Sheikh Ahmed shared his belief that the Palestinian people, known for their authenticity and readiness for sacrifice, have proven and will continue to prove their willingness to fight far beyond expectations. He envisioned the rebellion turning into a constant state of resistance, becoming the main focus of Palestinian life, with all other aspects, including education, work, and health, adapting to support this central goal until the occupation is defeated.

Hassan and Hussein, after performing the Isha prayer at the local mosque, discussed the likelihood of the next day mirroring the day’s events with more clashes, injuries, and the inevitable gathering at Al-Shifa Hospital, which would attract Israeli forces to disperse the crowds. Recognizing the need to prepare, Hassan suggested a plan to Hussein, which involved filling empty bottles with gasoline to create Molotov cocktails. After preparing around forty bottles, they discreetly placed them under an olive tree near the hospital, ready for the next day's confrontations, and then returned home.

In the morning, the city ignited with protests, and the injured were rushed to Al-Shifa Hospital, where crowds gathered, chanting slogans from Islamic history, signaling defiance against the occupiers. By noon, Israeli forces surrounded the hospital, clashing with protesters. Hussein, anticipating the soldiers, distributed Molotov cocktails along the hospital's walls and prepared an empty barrel as a platform. As forces advanced, he threw a lit cocktail at a jeep, causing chaos among the soldiers and forcing them to retreat under a barrage of stones and additional Molotov cocktails from Hussein. The clashes persisted into the

evening, with Hussein single-handedly using forty Molotov cocktails, supported by Hassan under the cover of night.

Elsewhere, a boy ingeniously placed nails on wooden blocks across pathways used by military jeeps, creating traps to puncture their tires. This resulted in four jeeps being disabled, blocking the way for others and marking a small victory celebrated with triumphant chants by the youths, oblivious to the danger of leftover traps.

This narrative captures the ingenuity, resilience, and defiance of the Palestinian people amidst the escalating tensions and their unyielding spirit against the occupation forces, blending individual acts of resistance into the collective struggle for freedom.

As Ibrahim was driving along the dirt road in the evening, one of his tires punctured. He got out to inspect the cause, fetched a jack, and started to fix the punctured tire, fuming with anger and frustration. When he lifted the tire and saw the nail fixed onto a piece of wood, he burst into laughter, muttering "A mighty people, a mighty people." After changing the tire, he rushed to Hassan's workshop and asked him to prepare thousands of small pieces of strong wire, cutting each piece to a length of six centimeters, bending them in the middle at a right angle, then welding two pieces together at the centre so that they resembled the leg of a bird. No matter how it was thrown, one of its four ends would always point upwards while resting on the other three.

Hassan prepared a large quantity within hours. Ibrahim came to pick them up and took them back home, then set out to distribute them among activists in various areas to be thrown on the roads in front of the occupation soldiers' vehicles when they chased the masked protesters.

The next day, wherever they passed and whenever they drove, you could see the occupiers' vehicles tilted to one side after one of their tires exploded. The soldiers found themselves trapped, unable to advance towards the masked ones and the protesters, unable to retreat with their vehicles, and unable to continue in this state, calling for help and reinforcements which, if they arrived, either collided with protesters and barricades or met the same fate as those they rushed to assist.

It was an immensely enjoyable and hilarious day, watching their vehicles in that state, and it seemed most of their rubber-tired vehicles were either disabled or they feared the remaining ones would be too, so they deployed tanks with heavy

iron tracks instead. This uplifted people's spirits, seeing the enemy in disarray and acting hysterically, which encouraged their boldness and readiness.

When we were children, influenced by the guerrilla warfare of that time, we had a dangerous game where we would take a key with a hole at the end, stuff it with matchstick sulfur, tie the key to a long string at the end far from the sulfur, and attach a nail to the other end of the string, slightly inserting the nail into the keyhole gently. We would swing the key with the nail fixed in it back and forth several times until it sped up, then strike it against a wall. When the nail hit the wall and struck the sulfur in the key's hole, the sulfur would ignite in that confined space and create a very loud explosion sound.

This game was quite popular among the camp kids, often resulting in some getting reprimanded by their guardians due to its dangerous nature and the disturbance it caused. The idea was simply that igniting a small amount of sulfur in a confined space would create an explosion. The lack of safe, conventional weapons in the occupied territories led to the innovation of preparing simple explosive devices from readily available basic materials.

Three young men from Jabalia camp, one of them a plumber, were engrossed in making handcrafted explosive devices filled with sulfur. Through a pre-made hole, they inserted a flammable strip. Dozens of these were meticulously prepared, as any mistake or excessive friction could generate heat leading to the device exploding in the hands of its makers. Then, they set out to distribute them among some of their peers, readying them for the next day's confrontations.

In the morning, as usual, gatherings, demonstrations, clashes, stone-throwing, shooting, and tear gas by soldiers against protesters took place, along with Molotov cocktails. A number of youths lurked behind walls, bushes, or graves beside the roads. As a patrol car passed by, one of them lit the dangling strip from the device and hurled it towards the vehicle, causing an explosion that produced a terrifying sound and occasionally injured some soldiers.

One evening in the early days of the Intifada, my brother Mahmoud had several friends over. I recognized some but not others. They sat in the guest room, and the situation suggested a quasi-organizational meeting. They discussed and debated for hours, sometimes raising their voices, divided between those in favor of fully engaging in the events and those against it. Ultimately, they agreed to participate under the condition of forming a unified national framework along

with the national factions represented in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to work together.

Days later, another group of guests arrived, a mix from the national factions. Known to some of us, they sat for a long while, discussing and dialoguing, advocating for intensifying the uprising against the occupiers. It became known to all that two manifestos were about to be issued, one by the Unified Leadership and the other by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), both calling for escalation and continuity but each proposing a different program of activities: the first calling for a general strike on, say, Sunday, and the second for a strike on Monday; the first for sit-ins on Wednesday, and the second for a collective fasting on Thursday in solidarity with the wounded.

Each manifesto sees activists from all sides distributing their pamphlets, trying to spread them as widely as possible. On the day of every event, activists, masked, take to the streets to enforce everyone's compliance without breaches that show weakness, incapacity, or indifference among the citizens. This has several times led to friction and disputes, which were controlled at the last moment from escalating into fights and clashes, with immediate issues being addressed as they arose.

The Unified Leadership sees itself as representing the PLO, the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and thus holds the right to determine the pace of escalation, imposing the program of events and activities. Hamas, seeing itself as a significant, active faction without representation in the PLO, believes this does not deprive it of its right to impose its activities program and determine its desired pace. Ultimately, the street and citizens' readiness are the decisive factors.

Fierce debates often erupted at home between my brother Mahmoud and one of my siblings, Hasan or Muhammad, or my cousin Ibrahim. It's well-known that Mahmoud is from the Unified Leadership, while Hasan, Muhammad, and Ibrahim are from the other side. The debate rages about the legitimacy of one side's actions or another's attempt to override or ignore the existence and impact of the other. Each side presents evidence of its authority and claims to have planned, ignited, or developed the uprising and its activities.

With each passing week, the uprising extends to new areas previously untouched, with new segments of the population joining. It indeed started to transform into a lifestyle, becoming the backbone of the daily Palestinian pattern, around which

other daily activities and events began to adapt. This ensures their continuity for the necessity of life and society in a way that does not conflict with the ongoing uprising.

Children go to their schools, learning in the morning, and in the evening, the streets ignite with clashes, confrontations, and demonstrations. Traders buy, sell, and conduct their business in the morning, and in the afternoon, a general strike prevails, affecting other community sectors.

In the first months, particularly in Hebron, which lagged behind other areas, a meeting was attended by several leaders of the Islamic current in the city, including Jamal and Abdul Rahman. The discussion became heated between supporters and opponents of participation, extending the debate until finally, a compromise was reached for a gradual start of activities with a limited number of participants, followed by an assessment of the outcomes. With the activities beginning on a limited scale and receiving broad acceptance and participation from the general population, a decision was made to form an emergency committee headed by Jamal to develop activities towards escalation and continuity.

In a relatively short period, the activities had evolved, and all other forces had entered the fray. Wide sectors of the population were still undecided about the uprising, such as the workers who worked within the territories occupied in 1948. Their interest and their families' livelihood depended on calm and their ability to go to their jobs. This sector, in particular, had to adapt to the uprising as other sectors did; because it had commitments with its Jewish employers inside.

With the escalation of the uprising's activities, its continuity, and its clear annoyance to the occupation, the Israeli Defense Minister, "Yitzhak Rabin," decided to start implementing the policy of breaking bones where throwing a stone at one of the patrols from among a crowd should be met with violent punishment on the entire assembly, so that the crowd learns to prevent anyone among them from doing so.

Automatically, a young man among a group of workers throws a stone at one of the passing patrols, prompting the soldiers to stop and start attacking the crowd with beatings and kicks. Suddenly, the crowd roars mightily, and everyone, in a collective automatic motion akin to a mechanical action, bends down, picks up stones, and hurls them at the aggressors. This sector, which had been hesitant, merges into the uprising, attempting to reconcile contradictions. It continues to

seek sustenance for its children where possible and participates in this popular epic as much as it can.

Chapter Twenty-One

Due to the large overcrowding in the house, the family decided to build a second floor. The task primarily fell on Ibrahim's shoulders, with Hassan and I assisting, and Mahmoud providing engineering guidance and procuring necessary tools. We resolved to work gradually in a way that wouldn't disrupt life in the house, as we had nowhere else to live.

Mahmoud marked spots for us to dig next to and beneath the walls, making a pit every four meters. As we dug each pit, Ibrahim prepared iron rods shaped like a cage. Once a pit was dug, he placed the cage inside, and we had already prepared the concrete to pour into the pit after Ibrahim extended vertical bars from the cage, filling the pit with concrete instead of sand, forming one of the building's foundations to support the second floor. After a day, Ibrahim would prepare the iron for the concrete column, set up the wooden scaffolding, attach it to the wall from the outside, and pour the concrete into it to a height of four meters. The next day, we would remove the wood and start on the second foundation, then the second column, and so on, until we finished all twenty-four columns.

Mahmoud borrowed enough wood and support pipes from his contractor friends to roof half the house. Ibrahim started setting up the scaffolding for half the roof after we removed the old asbestos roof. Then, with Hassan's help, he began preparing the steel reinforcement for the roof, leaving excesses to be connected to the other half of the house's roof to be completed later under Mahmoud's supervision, with me working under their direction. Mahmoud borrowed a mixer from a contractor, and they brought in cement, sand, and gravel. Other young friends and neighbours came to help us, completing that task.

On a Friday, just before the noon prayer, we finished the task and prepared to pray, agreeing to return for lunch. The family lived under exceptional conditions for two weeks in the western half of the house until the concrete in the eastern half dried. We then dismantled the wood, and Ibrahim continued the old walls up to the roof, then cut them along with the roof. As each room was ready, its occupant moved back in until the entire family moved to the eastern half, and we began work on completing the western half.

During three weeks, the construction was completed, except for some arrangements related to raising the floors and tiling them... which began

simultaneously with the start of the work on raising the columns and building the external walls on the second floor. It was clear that we had to make the window levels very high on the second floor, higher than head levels, so as not to reveal the interiors to the neighbours.

The Intifada's activities were becoming more intense and inflamed. Despite our significant engagement with the work at home, we maintained our role in these activities. I occasionally participated in clashes and confrontations against the occupation forces. It was evident that Mahmoud and Ibrahim were still playing their prominent leadership roles, each in his organization, especially in organizing activities, directing, distributing flyers, and resolving emerging issues. It seems that Israeli leaders, after seeing that mere suppression was insufficient to stop the Intifada, which was clearly becoming a permanent and chronic phenomenon, decided to open the Negev prison, which could accommodate tens of thousands of detainees, and place it directly under military responsibility, after the regular prisons had become full.

Indeed, the army prepared vast areas in the Negev, surrounded them with barbed wire and watchtowers, and started a wide arrest campaign to gather all activists or those suspected of having a direct or indirect role in fueling the spirit of the Intifada and its continuity, and threw them into the prison.

Among the first batches of detainees were my brother Mahmoud and my cousin Ibrahim, where a large force raided the house at night and arrested them amid my mother's, their wives', and the children's screams, screams of fear, anger, or confusion. They were immediately placed under administrative detention for six months without trial by a decision from the military governor of the area.

The first batch arrived at the prison, which was still just vast areas of land surrounded by barbed wire and scattered with watchtowers. They were "warmly" welcomed with beating, kicking, and humiliation by being forced to sit cross-legged on the ground, hands clasped over their bowed heads, along with more beating, kicking, and insults. Then, groups of them were ordered to stand up to set up large military tents, after which each one received four blankets and was distributed into the tents, about twenty detainees per tent. Detainees kept pouring into the camp every hour, hundreds by day and night, non-stop, and with each new batch's arrival, the same "warm" reception and honors were repeated.

Roll call was conducted four times a day. A soldier would announce the count through a loudspeaker, and everyone had to come out of the tents and sit in the

wide square in front of the section, cross-legged in an orderly manner according to the numbers given to them, and the count would begin. The officer would call out the number, and the detainee would say his name, or the officer would call out the first number, which should be answered with "yes," and then the second would state his number, and so on. If there was any error, the process would start over, sometimes lasting one, two, or three hours, with the group sitting on the ground, rifles aimed at them from behind the barbed wire, soldiers on watchtowers pointing their heavy machine guns at the group, and dozens of soldiers around them carrying batons.

The food, barely enough for one, let alone five or seven, the clothes dirty and insufficient, mostly too large, forcing detainees to tie them with a piece of cloth to stay up on their waists, water scarce and rare, showers once a week, within five minutes one must be done, toilets a row of adjacent small wooden shacks set above a long pit like a trench, with no drainage or water.

No family visits, no letters, and the Red Cross representatives who come for visits do nothing practical except write reports about the tragic human situation and submit them to higher authorities.

During the first weeks, the detainees began trying to organize and arrange their ranks in an attempt to improve their living conditions and enforce their respect on the brutish jailers. Immediately, the issue of factional representation arose, as factions represented in the Palestine Liberation Organization - Fatah, the Popular Front, the Democratic Front, and other organizations agreed not to recognize the existence of Islamic organizations, neither Hamas nor Jihad, and that individuals coming to prison must live under the responsibility of one of the PLO organizations only, and could not exist independently.

The number of individuals affiliated with the PLO was much larger, and it was clear that this was enforced by force, and anyone who refused could face violence and coercion. The minority of Islamists had to accept the reality temporarily and live in silence for the time being. Ibrahim had to live according to that equation... He gave Mahmoud long looks of disapproval. Mahmoud smiled, raising his hands as if to say: What can you do? You have no choice but to accept the reality of living under my direct responsibility. Ibrahim shook his head as if to say: Slow down... for every decree there is a book.

The intense conflict was with the prison administration, as the harsh conditions necessitated immediate action. However, any form of protest or objection was

immediately met with severe repression and collective punishment. Detainees were gathered in the yards, sitting on the ground for long hours. Then the prison commander would arrive in his military uniform, hands on his hips, strutting around, stomping his feet, and threatening in broken Arabic.

Mohammad had settled in Ramallah, and it fell upon my brother Hassan and me to shoulder the entire family's responsibilities, especially concerning my mother, my brother Mahmoud's wife and children, and my sister Mariam, Ibrahim's wife. The construction process in the house was halted, turning our home into a scene of misery with my mother, Mahmoud's wife, and Mariam crying. Whenever food was served, my mother would burst into tears, followed by the others, causing the children to cry. Hassan and I would then try to calm everyone down, offering consolation and urging patience, reassuring that this period wouldn't last long. Whenever one of the children needed something or asked when their father would return, their mother would break down crying, leaving Hassan and me to pick up the pieces and restore some semblance of stability.

Suddenly, and unexpectedly, they came and arrested "Hassan" as well. I found myself facing a human tragedy I couldn't bear, with Hassan's wife and children joining the sorrow. I attempted to offer comfort, succeeding at times and losing my patience at others, resulting in me yelling that this sadness and crying were unjustified. Was six months of imprisonment worth all this anguish? It seemed that shouting at them was more effective in ending their grief, or at least hiding it, as one of them would enter her room, leaving me unsure of her condition. However, the collective wailing and lamenting in the house began to subside, and it seemed they had adjusted to the reality after the first two months.

Upon Hassan's arrival in the Negev, he was joined by hundreds of detainees from Gaza and the West Bank, activists from all forces and directions. It became clear that the number of Islamists was significantly increasing, and they started to form a noticeable and evident force. After a few days, a group of them, led by Ibrahim and Hassan, decided to end their erasure as a collective entity and demanded recognition as individuals. They approached Mahmoud and leaders from the national forces, informing them that they must be treated as an independent force with their entity and that some tents should be vacated for them to live together, just like the other factions, allowing them to conduct their lives in a manner that suits them.

The refusal and threats of force made it clear that the situation was escalating towards confrontation. These young men began to impose their will, organizing

collective prayers led by their own imam, delivering Friday sermons, and holding group sessions. As new detainees arrived, including some strong-willed individuals who refused to accept the status quo, verbal altercations escalated into physical confrontations, punches, slaps, and then escalated to stones and tent poles being used as weapons. Several were injured, and the Israeli soldiers watched without intervening until the fight ended, then they stepped in to remove the injured and provide treatment, presenting the situation to the media in an embarrassing light, portraying Palestinian detainees fighting and injuring each other while their oppressors provide care.

The problem remained unresolved, with each side sticking to its stance. Personal disputes, like those between Mahmoud on one side and Ibrahim and Hassan on the other, seemed to mirror and exacerbate ideological and factional tensions. The atmosphere remained tense, both internally among the factions within the PLO and between the Islamists, and externally between all detainees and the prison administration, which treated them horrendously. Another clash occurred, not as large as the previous one, and the voices of reason from both sides rose, stating that the situation was unbearable and unsustainable. Meetings and dialogues were held, and the Islamists' demands were met, recognizing them as an independent force with rights equal to any other faction, and specific tents were allocated to them.

The Intifada continued to escalate and spread during its first months to cover the entire occupied Palestinian territory, leaving no city, village, camp, or alley untouched. Each community played its part in the activities according to its abilities and circumstances. The phenomenon of massive protesting crowds began to fade, shifting to specific numbers in every alley, street, neighbourhood, and village. They lit tires, set up barriers and barricades, and when occupation forces arrived, they were met with stone-throwing, Molotov cocktails, and sulfur bombs, which the youngsters called "elbows." No patrol, whether on foot or in vehicles, could pass through any street, alley, or junction without encountering resistance.

The deployment of tear gas bombs, live, rubber, and plastic bullets, arrests, and bone-breaking by the occupation forces continued and escalated, while the activities of the insurgents increased, and the involvement of both young men and women rose. At every alleyway, when the young boys had a moment to converse, each would start showing off the marks of a baton that cracked his head, and the stitch marks still visible. Those who had not received any such "medals" would try

to change the subject or seize the opportunity of a patrol's arrival to rush towards it, inflamed with zeal, seeking a badge of honor like their peers, proving their courage and manhood.

To identify activists and key players in stirring up events, Israeli intelligence was forced to deploy its informants, pushing them to be near clash sites and mosque entrances. Some of these informants were already suspected by the community due to their notorious reputation, and some operated in an overt and conspicuous manner, prompting the youths to withdraw from the area and return masked to avoid being recognized and reported, leading to their arrest by the intelligence that would come to detain them.

On one occasion, following the martyrdom of a comrade, as his pure body was taken to the mosque to start the funeral procession, a massive crowd of men, women, and children from the camp gathered. One of the suspected informants stood conspicuously at the corner of the opposite street, causing unrest among the activists. As they began to withdraw and return masked, the crowd grew, and suddenly, a masked youth shouted for action against these traitors who monitor and report to the intelligence, leading to their arrests. He urged the crowd to target the known suspect, and without hesitation, they surged towards him, kicking and beating him nearly to death until a voice of reason intervened, pulling him out severely swollen from the assault.

The practice of beating and "punishing" suspected informants spread widely, with many informants blatantly observing protesters or masked individuals in a foolish and exposed manner. Often, an informant would chase a group of masked individuals for long distances to identify them once they removed their masks, leading to severe beatings by the protesters or the masked individuals, sometimes nearly resulting in death.

One of these well-known agents was working as an administrative supervisor at the Al-Shifa Hospital, which is a governmental institution supervised by the Health Department of the Civil Administration. They made sure to employ their agents in such sensitive positions. The man's reputation was notorious, and his collaboration was evident, as he often lifted the phone to call the military governor or soldiers to arrest injured individuals (before the Intifada).

When the Intifada started, this agent made sure to lay low, especially when gatherings were large and angry. Once, when a large crowd had gathered bringing several wounded individuals, one of the youths noticed him and alerted the

crowd to his true nature. The crowd then stoned him like a demon, followed by a swarm of people kicking and hitting him with shoes and hands until his body swelled, barely escaping alive when a large force of occupation troops raided the place.

The visibility of these infamous agents diminished slightly, but whenever one appeared and fell into the hands of the crowds, they made him suffer for the years of oppression the occupation and its collaborators had inflicted. It seems the intelligence started employing its agents more cleverly, but the experience of the insurgents was evolving in response.

Often, an agent was caught red-handed recording the names of protesters, or another was found taking pictures with a small camera disguised as a lighter or similar device, or another was caught recording a Friday sermon in a mosque with a small recorder supplied by the intelligence for such tasks. The crowd would beat the culprits with shoes, and because the occupation forces, in their official uniforms and armed to the teeth, were met by protesters who paralyzed their movements whenever they attempted to reach a target, every appearance of a patrol was aggressively blocked by the youth. The occupation forces began developing their tactics, installing metal wire mesh on car windows to prevent glass breakage from thrown stones, then started using special forces dressed in civilian clothes, blending in with Palestinians. They moved on foot or used vehicles with local license plates, confiscated or owned, moving inconspicuously with hidden weapons. Upon encountering a masked individual or active protester, they would draw their weapons and detain the person, firing at those who intervened, while a large military force nearby would quickly come to their aid. Sometimes, these forces approached protesters or masked individuals, opening fire to injure or sometimes with the intention to kill, especially at the beginning of such encounters.

These forces achieved their goals of arrests or wounding and liquidation, and also stirred fear among the public towards the masked individuals. However, it wasn't long before the masses became accustomed to this and developed the ability to detect them.

On numerous occasions, members of these forces got trapped among huge crowds or large groups of masked individuals, tasting the bitter pill they had often forced upon these youths and crowds. Sometimes, confusions arose when crowds mistook a group of masked Intifada youths for enemies and attempted to attack them, forcing them to reveal their personal identities to avoid punishment.

Rumors widely circulated among the people that some collaborators were partaking in the special forces attacking the youth. On several occasions, protesters succeeded in unmasking one of these attackers, identifying him or having the rescuing crowd recognize him. This increased the resentment towards collaborators; if one was caught, they received a harsher punishment than their predecessors.

The number of detainees in the Negev prison swelled to thousands, with the prison divided into sections identified by numbers, maintaining the same management style of repression and violence. Any act was met with beatings and a deluge of tear gas, or threats and ranting from the prison commander.

On one occasion, the duration of sitting in anticipation of the roll call extended due to multiple errors by the officers in counting, causing visible restlessness among the detainees. Tensions rose, and a large force was mobilized, with the prison commander accusing the detainees of cowardice and challenging them to identify the speaker. One young man stood, declaring himself the speaker, asserting their collective manhood against the cowardice of the soldiers. The commander pointed his weapon at the youth, who did not flinch and stood firm, leading to the commander shooting him dead with a single bullet between the eyes, falling as a martyr.

The sound of the gunshot and "As'ad's" fall signaled the start of a fierce uprising within the prison. All present leapt to action, hurling anything they could find at the occupation soldiers guarding the prison, who responded with a barrage of gunfire, while soldiers in watchtowers opened fire with heavy machine guns.

The prison was flooded with tear gas as detainees started to tear down tents and charge at the barbed wire enclosing the prison sections, shaking and attempting to uproot it. It became clear that the situation had spiraled out of the special forces' control, prompting the summoning of a large military force equipped with tanks to surround the prison and set up heavy machine guns, fearing the detainees might break through the barbed wire and escape. It was evident that violence wouldn't resolve the issue.

High-ranking military officials began seeking dialogue with some of the detainees' leaders to calm the situation. Negotiations started on one side, while violence persisted on the other, until it was agreed to dismiss that commander and fundamentally change the approach to dealing with detainees. Changes included a more respectful counting method, improved food quality, canteen purchases,

immunity for leaders from searches, and freedom of movement and assembly within the prison. The situation began to calm and stabilize, and gradually, conditions inside the prison improved.

The prison transformed into an academy teaching the culture and arts of the Intifada. In one tent, a session on the history of the Palestinian cause was held; in another, a session on security sciences and interrogation methods; in a third, a discussion on the jurisprudence of jihad and martyrdom. There were literacy classes, Arabic calligraphy courses, and more. Young men entered the prison illiterate and left after six months able to read and write, equipped with various skills needed for their cause.

Groups of friends in different areas or mosques planned their activities for when they were released, vowing to continue and develop the Intifada. With the largest gathering of Palestinian activists from all factions now in the Negev prison, Israeli intelligence began paying close attention to this assembly, sending dozens of their agents disguised as detainees. These agents were tasked with gathering information on the activists' intentions, statements, and activities, hoping to integrate and then thwart their plans upon release.

Some of these individuals were well-known figures, already compromised to activists from different factions, while others were unknown. As experienced individuals, the detainees decided to start a security operation from within the prison, where they would monitor, record, manufacture, follow up, and interrogate. This led to investigations of some of these agents or suspects, often involving excessive use of physical force, which sometimes resulted in unintended deaths or physical harm to some of those being interrogated. Despite the negatives of this phenomenon, it unveiled many of the intelligence plans aimed at striking at the Intifada, and sometimes at the physical elimination of some activists. Importantly, the Negev prison, which housed tens of thousands of detainees, turned into a real academy. Waves of youth entered and graduated, all studying, gaining experience, and exchanging knowledge.

The phenomenon of pursuing collaborators extended to the streets of the homeland, where groups from all factions began to chase, arrest, or kidnap the well-known collaborators, taking them to cisterns or deserted, remote places for days-long interrogations, sometimes using violence or even excessive force. Some of these groups went as far as killing these collaborators and dumping their bodies in garbage heaps or public squares to achieve a deterrent effect. Occasionally, a collaborator was brought to a public square, tied to a power pole, and whipped,

had a hand or leg cut off, or was shot. This phenomenon increased and became a field of competition among some groups, leading to grotesque and disgusting manifestations of violence.

No doubt, lines were sometimes crossed, exaggerating minor issues, which led to injustices in some cases. However, it became evident that the phenomenon of collaboration with the occupation had weakened and was clearly struck, achieving a deterrent effect as many collaborators disappeared, fled to the occupation, or traveled abroad. Due to the intense pressure on collaborators and the flight of many of them, sometimes with their families, the enemy's intelligence opened a centre for gathering them in the Gaza Strip, in an area called "Dehiniya," and a centre in the West Bank called "Makhma." In many cases, the occupying forces did not intervene to protect their agents when they were being killed or tortured, as such intervention would force them into densely populated areas, exposing them to danger from stones, Molotov cocktails, and homemade bombs that had become prevalent in the alleys and in the hands of youths. These collaborators were initially recruited to serve the enemy, not the other way around.

Sometimes, to save one of their significant informants (in very rare cases), a helicopter with forces would descend to rescue him and his family from their home before the surging crowds could raid it. However, this phenomenon diminished, and the fear of informants and their reports lessened in intensity. The overt manifestations of their movement and surveillance began to disappear and end. In the camp, every day, families celebrate the release of their sons from detention after serving their sentences, while other families weep and wail for the arrest of their sons during the night. The releases and arrests are daily and non-stop.

Mahmoud and Ibrahim were released, and we celebrated their return with greetings from neighbours and relatives. Each of them returned to their duties, either in work or study and their role in the Intifada activities, but with more caution and vigilance. We returned to complete the construction of the second floor...

Upon Ibrahim's release, "Faiz" became more frequent in visiting him and our home, sticking to Ibrahim like a shadow, hardly ever leaving his side. We exploited this well in several directions; we tasked him with the heavy and tiresome tasks in the construction work at the home, from porterage to transportation. He was keen to show dedication, working with all his energy, giving us ease. Ibrahim would subtly suggest to him the importance of staying

away from the violent events of the Intifada so that it would reach the intelligence agencies, dissuading them from the idea of arresting him again. It was not difficult for us to arrange a logical and reasonable way for Ibrahim to slip away from Faiz's shadow if he wanted to accomplish an important and sensitive task we didn't want Faiz to know about.

I discussed Faiz several times with Ibrahim, questioning how it's acceptable to overlook him after confirming his betrayal and dealings with the occupation's intelligence. Ibrahim always assured me that everything was excellent in its time, that he didn't want anything to happen to Faiz that the intelligence would hold him responsible for, and that a reasonable arrangement for Faiz would seem ordinary. Ibrahim had a high ability to present things naturally, to conceal what was inside him, to suppress his emotions, and to disguise in a way that even his wife, my sister Mariam, rarely sensed his unusual movements during his duties and roles in the Intifada activities, even though he was considered a central figure in his group, bearing a significant burden.

My mother felt it in her heart without catching any concrete evidence or proof; she would come to him every now and then, saying, "Oh Ibrahim, enough, enough, do not get involved and lose yourself, your wife, and your child whom your wife is carrying and whose due date is approaching." He would laugh, joke, and calm her down, appearing as if he is not involved in anything worrisome and that he is the calmest young man in the camp, asserting that he will not return to prison. My mother would be silenced as she could not argue with him since she had no proof to validate her fears and suspicions, while he had an incredible ability to evade and turn the conversation into jokes and laughter until Mariam's face, which was pale at the start of my mother’s talk, would break into a sweat from the easing tension and her laughter would burst forth, calming her nerves.

My mother felt reassured about my brother Mahmoud, that he would not get involved in serious issues as he is older, experienced, and sensible. He might participate in some activities, but he would not physically handle stones, and she knew him well so her worries for him were very minimal. Her concern for Hassan was more than for Mahmoud but tens of times less than for her son-in-law Ibrahim. As for me, it seemed she was not worried at all, knowing that my involvement in the Intifada activities was very limited, especially since I had no political or ideological affiliations. My brother Mohammed, by his nature, was calm and occupied with his work at Birzeit University and preparing his master's thesis.

Her expressions of concern were evident in waiting for each of us to return home and monitoring our departure and return times, especially late at night. She often conducted inspection campaigns in Mahmoud's or Hassan's room and especially Ibrahim's room, gathering the three women with her to enter the room. They would start inspecting the drawers and shelves, and she would ask one of them to read every piece of paper, fearing that something forbidden might have fallen from one of them, which the occupying army and its intelligence could find during a search or arrest. She never found anything compromising behind Ibrahim, as he was meticulous and cleaned everything well behind him. She occasionally found papers behind Mahmoud, like a draft statement for the Unified Leadership, when he returned home, she would hold a 'parade' and set up a military court for him.

Once, I saw her conducting a thorough and radical inspection of Ibrahim's car, as if she had found something. She stormed into him while he was eating, kicked his wife out of the room, and closed the door. Her voice would rise occasionally with general remarks that implied reprimand, then it would soften when she spoke about what she had found in his car. It was clear that he was trying to use his usual method of diffusing the situation with humor and laughter, but this time he was unable to succeed, and it seemed that she had caught him red-handed in a heinous crime.

The interrogation and closed trial procedures for Ibrahim continued for more than half an hour, and when the door opened and she left, I sneaked a peek to see Ibrahim's condition. He looked as if ten interrogators had descended upon him in one of the harshest rounds of interrogation, like those from the interrogation slaughterhouse in Gaza Central Prison. I smiled mockingly, and he responded with an angry look, as if to say he would take it out on my hide instead of my mother's... I tried hard to find out what had been caught from him, and from her, and from Mariam.

Mariam truly didn't know, because if she had known, she couldn't have hidden it from me, but he and my mother dealt with me with utmost cunning and secrecy, and would scold me whenever I broached the topic to find out what had happened. Years later, I learned that she had found a 9mm bullet cartridge on the car's driver-side floor, confirming that he had a hidden weapon, which was a danger and a disaster. But what warranted the stringent measures was his negligence in dropping that bullet and leaving it there without noticing and removing it.

A long time passed, and the events of the Intifada continued to unfold and escalate, eventually encompassing the entire homeland. The name of these events became known as the Intifada, a term that entered foreign languages as is. When you listen to news bulletins on Israeli radio or television, the word Intifada recurs, as it does on foreign stations.

Once, Ibrahim sat with Fayez in my presence and started talking to him to convince him to reduce his visits and to decrease his interactions with Ibrahim, because he feared that one of the agents might notice their relationship and report it to the intelligence, leading to their arrest on suspicion of planning something specific. Fayez tried to alleviate Ibrahim's fears, insisting they were unnecessary, but Ibrahim cornered him and enforced that, and indeed, Fayez reduced his visits to our house, though he did not completely stop. One day, on the anniversary of Isra and Mi'raj, Hamas's statement, which had been distributed in advance, called for activities and confrontations on this day to commemorate the night journey to Al-Aqsa Mosque and the ascension to heaven. From morning, the young men began setting up barriers, igniting tires, and throwing some small homemade bombs into them to create sounds of explosions, creating a serious atmosphere for the strike called by the movement, and to provoke the occupation forces to come searching for the explosions so that confrontations could occur. At the heads of several alleys, a number of masked individuals succeeded.

When the occupation forces arrived, they were met with stones and Molotov cocktails, leading them to open fire. In response, several homemade bombs were thrown at them, causing considerable confusion among the occupation forces, which intensified their gunfire towards the demonstrators who excelled at hiding behind barricades and walls. Several were wounded, and on that day, "Fayez" was killed. Ibrahim, who was next to him, screamed that Fayez had been hit. Other youths rushed towards them, and upon examination, they confirmed he was dead, declaring he had been martyred with a bullet to his head. Ibrahim ordered them to carry his body away so it wouldn't end up in the hospital, knowing the occupation forces might access the medical reports. The camp erupted in fury, and the masses came out angry, carrying Fayez to his grave, shouting and threatening. I had no doubt he wasn't killed by the occupation forces' bullets, but I dared not discuss this with Ibrahim, who definitely wouldn't have allowed me to speak of it. Yet, eyes conveyed what tongues hesitated to say.

Decisions to close Palestinian universities issued by the military governors aimed to prevent the large gatherings of students, which could spark confrontations and exhaustion, indicating that the situation would prolong. However, the academic journey had to continue, and a feasible solution was found by converting classrooms into mosques and public institutions. For example, the Islamic University announced that lectures for a certain course would be held in Al-Abbas Mosque in Gaza City, and another course in Palestine Mosque, specifying the day and time. Students would gather in the mosque, and the lecturer would come to them, allowing the educational process to continue amid difficulties and adaptation to the new reality.

Ibrahim and I had to attend lectures and exams, with Ibrahim in his final year and me with another year ahead. Despite all closures, sieges, and curfews, the journey continued. Ibrahim graduated, obtaining his Bachelor's degree in Biology, submitted his documents to work for UNRWA, and awaited approval.

My mother pressed him with all her might to travel abroad and apply for a job in Saudi Arabia or one of the Gulf countries, only to find her pleas met with deaf ears—one filled with clay and the other with dough. He had firmly decided not to leave the homeland, especially during this critical and dangerous phase.

My mother's heart told her that this young man should leave the country because his stay would come at a high cost, and she openly expressed this concern. As he persisted in his decision to stay, she began to implore and beseech him to travel abroad, even if just for two or three years, to no avail. His decision was final and adamant: "I will not leave the country, not even for a single moment."

Mohamed continued his work at Birzeit University amidst the difficulties, supervising students in the chemistry lab at the Faculty of Science. He noticed one student in particular, a quiet, morally upright, and diligent young man focused on successfully completing his experiment, which caught Mohamed's special attention. Impressed by the student's effort and dedication, Mohamed approached him to get to know him better, appreciating his religious demeanor and commending his hard work and diligence. He inquired about his living situation and roommates in the student housing, invited him to visit his home, and offered to help with any difficulties he might face in his chemistry studies.

Chapter Twenty-Two

My mother resumed pressuring Ibrahim to leave for Jordan to submit his application at the Saudi embassy or any other Gulf Arab embassy, where it was likely he would secure a job. He would take his wife and move away from the troubles and dangers lurking in every alley in Gaza. He would smile and respond to her that it was impossible, having resolved that he would not leave Gaza even if he had to survive on bread alone, and awaited a response from the UNRWA job application he had submitted for employment in the sector. After a while, the response came back negative; the number of applicants in his field exceeded the available positions, and he was not selected.

Seizing the opportunity again, my mother pressured him to travel abroad. However, he reminded her that he had a trade in construction that earned him a substantial livelihood and he did not need a job in the first place. Now that he had finished his studies, he could expand and develop his business, which would bring in a significant income.

Mariam gave birth to their first child, a daughter they named "Isra," to remind Ibrahim of his duty towards the land of the Isra and Mi'raj and the Al-Aqsa Mosque every time he saw her. As children are often reasons for people's reluctance towards jihad, naming her Isra was meant to inspire him towards his duty, rather than serve as an excuse for inaction. Ibrahim recounted the beautiful moments we had spent during our sit-in at the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque when the Jews threatened to storm it, his eyes welling up with tears.

Meanwhile, we continued finishing the second-floor of our house. We had completed the rooms and roofed them with the asbestos from the old ground floor roof. I witnessed an incident with Ibrahim that showed his love for the people around him. As we were leveling the roof, we had initially directed the slope westward as before. Suddenly, Ibrahim stopped working and said that we should not proceed this way. I asked, "What way?" He replied that we shouldn't let the roof slope towards the west. I asked, "Why?" He explained that the rainwater accumulating on our roof would fall onto our neighbours' roof. I noted that it had been that way before. He laughed and explained that the situation was different now; our roof was now three and a half meters higher than the neighbours', and the noise of water hitting their roof from that height during

heavy rain would be extremely disturbing and would make it unbearable for them to live with.

I realized that his reasoning was sound. Wondering what to do next, I asked, "But what should we do?" He replied, "Let's redo the work and slope the roof towards the east, so the water falls onto the street." He began by dismantling the top part of the wall that facilitated the previous slope, and then we rebuilt it in reverse, placed the roof, and added heavy stones on top to prevent it from being blown away by the wind.

In a short period, we completed the work on the house, which now consisted of four apartments, each with a degree of independence. I lived with my mother in one, with the understanding that Mohammed would stay with us there when he returned from Ramallah. Mahmoud, Hassan, and Ibrahim each settled into one of the other apartments, giving their wives greater freedom; they no longer had to wear their headscarves all day to cover their hair and feel embarrassed in front of their brothers-in-law.

Working with Ibrahim on building the house, I learned a lot about construction and began to participate more. He suggested that I join him in his work, as in a few months, I could become a professional builder under his tutelage, and we could work together as partners, especially since job opportunities were scarce. I found his suggestion reasonable and had nothing to lose, so I started working with him on various contracting jobs he undertook.

His business began to expand, and it was notable that he often asked us to complete specific parts of the job, claiming he had a quick errand to run. He would leave the site, drive off in his car, and be gone for long or short periods before returning to continue working. I often wondered where he went when he left his work like that. When I asked him, he would say, "Work, looking for more work, Ahmad. Before we finish one job, we need to have another lined up." Looking into his eyes, I was sure he was involved in a different type of work—searching for a type of work unrelated to the construction and building industry.

In the territories occupied in 1948, near a place called Sarafand, there is one of the major Israeli military camps. Hundreds of soldiers arrive at the site in the morning and leave in the evening to go home. They wait at car stops for any vehicle passing by on the main road to give them a ride, signaling with their hands for the cars going to and from to stop and take them on that cold evening.

Some of them start walking along the roadside, and whenever a car approaches, they signal it. Some cars pick up this soldier or that. A few kilometers ahead, at the first point where their paths diverge, they must look for another means of transportation to continue their journey. A white, new model Sparrow car with a yellow (Israeli) license plate, driven by a young man who appears to be of European descent... fair-skinned, blond hair, blue eyes, and beside him sits a young man who appears to be of Iraqi descent, and in the back seat, a young man who appears to be of Yemeni descent... The car radio plays a soft Hebrew song.

One of the soldiers urgently signals the car to stop, which it does. The soldier opens the back door and throws himself onto the seat, saying to the driver in Hebrew, "Drive" (in Hebrew, 'Lamisah'), to which the driver replies, "No problem" (in Hebrew, 'Beseder'). The car then moves off again, and after covering some distance, the passenger next to the driver brandishes a small knife and demands the driver not to make any sudden moves (in Hebrew, 'Shom Tanuah'), and says to the one sitting in the back seat in Arabic, "Take his gun," which he does. The soldier starts shaking and crying, calling out for his mother in Hebrew ('Imama') and urinates on himself.

Mohammed starts yelling at him, "You come here to kill us in Gaza and the West Bank, you've already stolen our land, there you brandish weapons and shoot at children, you think you're men, and here you want your mother and wet your pants." He shoots him once in the heart. The car turns onto a side road, the three young men get out, take digging tools from the car, and dig a hole to bury him after taking his weapon and documents. One of them screams while looking at the documents as the car speeds away from the area, "Oh no, this soldier was from the special forces of the Israeli Defense Forces, involved in highly classified commando operations and he had a medal of honor."

Days later, the same group kidnapped another soldier and took another Galil rifle while they were returning from the Gaza Strip. After burying the soldier in another area, while trying to cross the border fences that separate the Gaza Strip from the Israeli territories, one of the guards noticed them and contacted the forces guarding the area, which led to a chase that soon resulted in the arrest of some of the group members, while others escaped and vanished, then crossed the border into Egypt.

Investigations led to arrests, and since the soldiers and their weapons were still missing and none of the detainees knew their location, a curfew was imposed on the entire Gaza Strip, and a broad arrest campaign began. The ranks of Hamas

were so depleted that anyone who cast a shadow of doubt about their affiliation with the movement was arrested, and naturally, this included my brother Hassan and my cousin Ibrahim. Nothing definitive was established from the investigations, so they were transferred to administrative detention for three months and taken to the Negev desert prison.

A few days later, Mahmoud was also administratively detained for three months. There in the Negev, he met Hassan and Ibrahim, whose heads seemed to reach the skies as they stomped the ground with their feet, looking at Mahmoud who often critically asked: "What is your role in armed resistance?!" At the first chance to talk privately, Ibrahim said to him, "Now our role in armed resistance begins, Mahmoud, and these beginnings and what will follow, God willing, will speak for themselves." Mahmoud muttered, "Soon, soon..." but Hassan replied, "It's not important when, what's important is that it's the beginning, and what's to come. Now it's your turn to answer where you stand in fulfilling the duty." Mahmoud laughed and said, "You haven't done anything noteworthy yet, and you ask about our role? Our role is well-known, for thirty years we have been pioneers of armed guerrilla action, we ignited the revolution, we carried out tens of thousands of guerrilla operations." Ibrahim interrupted him, "We are the sons of today, and what matters now is who takes the banner and is able to carry it and pay its price." Mahmoud agreed, "True, true, we shall see, and in any case, welcome to the trench of resistance, now you occupy your positions with consent and respect."

Their conversation was cut short as several young men arrived at their spot near the tent, greeting them with "Peace be upon you, and God's mercy and blessings." They returned the greetings and Mahmoud excused himself to leave. The young men introduced themselves: "I am Ibrahim from Beach Camp, your brother Yasser from Khan Younis Camp, your brother Emad from Jabalia Camp, I am Mahmoud from Al-Bureij Camp, and I am Az el-Din from Shuja'iyya." They sat down and began discussing the heroic operations carried out by their brothers, which had put the occupiers in a difficult position where soldiers, symbols of security and state protection, are kidnapped and disappear, and the state security apparatus, despite its practices and brutality, cannot resolve this dilemma. They praised God that the door to battle through armed jihad had officially opened and that tomorrow would be bright and full of blessings, God willing.

The three months flew by quickly, and Hassan and Ibrahim returned home, followed by Mahmoud a few days later. Their return was met with the usual joy, celebration, and congratulations from neighbours and relatives. During this time,

Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait, and the U.S. and Western troops began to amass in the region to confront Iraq, causing the Intifada's activities to significantly subside as everyone awaited the outcome. The Palestinians were united in their anticipation of Saddam Hussein fulfilling his promises to obliterate half of Israel, and despite their empathy for the Iraqi people facing the Western war machine, they were eagerly awaiting the start of the war to see missiles crush the state of aggression. The evident fear and panic among the Israeli leadership and population, especially their fear of the chemical weapons that Iraq was rumored to possess, heightened the anticipation for the war.

Everyone nervously followed the news updates, particularly when air raid sirens went off in Israel for the first time, prompting Israelis to scramble for gas masks and take shelter. Palestinian crowds in various areas chanted in support of Saddam, "With our souls, with our blood, we will redeem you, O Saddam! Strike Tel Aviv!" For them, anyone who struck Tel Aviv became the beloved of a people who have suffered immensely for decades.

The radio announced the lifting of the emergency state, indicating that residents in most areas could remove their masks and leave their shelters. The rockets had landed in a limited area, and they were currently being inspected for any chemical agents. A profound silence fell over us as we sat in the dark night waiting for the results. After some time, it was announced that the explosives were conventional and there were no chemical weapons. It felt like cold water had been poured over us. Mahmoud broke the silence, suggesting that it might be a decoy operation to make them feel safe and not wear the masks, so a more devastating blow could follow. We all echoed, "Inshallah, Inshallah."

Hassan, with a strange confidence, said, "People, Saddam doesn't have chemical weapons; he won't strike Israel with them, and even if he did, it won't wipe Israel out." Mahmoud responded angrily, "Why such pessimistic thoughts?" Hassan confidently answered, "Because whoever will erase Israel must possess certain qualities, which are not present in..." Mahmoud interrupted him sharply, "I don't know where you get these ideas and statements from." Ibrahim tried to mediate, "Anyway, God willing, he has chemical weapons and uses them against them. There's still time, and it's too early to judge things now."

As the war continued and Iraqi rockets kept falling on Israel, the people's happiness was at its peak. True, Israel was not wiped off the map, but for the first time, it was being hit deep inside its territory, and all of them were running into shelters like terrified rats or wearing gas masks that killed some of them from

mere panic at the sound of the sirens. That alone was enough for the crowds to come out and see the rockets stretch towards the usurping entity, cheering and singing despite the outcome being somewhat predictable to many. However, many were disappointed when the conflict ended as it did.

This disappointment and frustration from the war outcomes on Iraq fueled the already blazing fury. The panic that shook the core of the usurping entity only reinforced people's belief in the fragility of this enemy. With the war's end and cessation, the Intifada's events erupted fiercer and sharper. It became clear that a broad sector of the active forces in the regions was increasingly using weapons against the occupying forces, especially since the number of martyrs had significantly risen during the period since the Intifada erupted, not to mention the staggering numbers of wounded.

But the territories were completely devoid of weapons; the occupation had methodically worked over nearly two and a half decades of its occupation of Gaza and the West Bank to empty the regions of weapons and ammunition and to seal all avenues through which they might be brought, imposing severe penalties on anyone involved in this trade. People didn't even know how to use weapons if they found them. Therefore, activists resorted to using bladed weapons like knives, daggers, machetes, and swords, in addition to batons, and it was very rare to see an old Carlo Gustav rifle or a pistol.

My mother didn't stop her inspection campaigns in Mahmoud, Hassan, and Ibrahim's rooms for any prohibited items they might have carelessly left visible or dropped. During one of her campaigns in Ibrahim's bedroom, while searching, she pulled out a dresser drawer entirely and noticed a small cardboard box fixed inside the cavity. Opening the box, she found a pistol. She nearly fainted but quickly composed herself and hid the pistol so that Mariam wouldn't see it.

Ibrahim was not home at that time, so she began an interrogation with his wife, asking where her husband hides his things and probing with more questions. Mariam knew nothing and was perplexed by my mother's manner of inquiry.

When Ibrahim returned home, my mother acted normally and didn't mention the gun. That evening, we heard shouting at Mariam, but it was unclear what was happening. Hearing this, my mother rushed up the stairs to their room. Entering, she found them arguing. Mariam turned to her screaming, "I don't know what's happening here. In the morning, your mother interrogates me over something I know nothing about, and now my husband does the same in the evening. I feel

like a deaf person at a wedding, not understanding what's happening in my own room!" Then she burst into tears.

Her tears seemed to be the relief needed for Ibrahim as it shifted my mother's focus to comforting and reconciling with Mariam. Ibrahim realized that it was my mother who had found his stash. He stayed silent, waiting for her to start the conversation. She finally turned to him and said, "Didn't I tell you that you should leave the country? My heart has been telling me all along that you would throw yourself, your wife, and your daughter into hell!"

Ibrahim smiled and said, "Auntie, it seems I must now say what I have tried for years not to say. Listen up, Mariam, and you too, Ahmed, since you are here and the door is open." He continued, "I chose my path not today, but years ago. I chose it the day I heard that my brother 'Hassan' married a Jewish woman and lives with her in Tel Aviv. I chose the path of jihad and resistance and have walked it and will continue to walk it. Nothing will stop me. That's why I chose to study at the Islamic University and not just any university. Mahmoud was angry with me that day. I chose to work in construction in Gaza rather than take a job in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, which upset my aunt."

"I have chosen my path and I will not abandon it. God is my witness that I love you all, I love you more than anything in this world. However, if you try to stop me from continuing on my path, I will forsake my love for all of you, even for Mariam and Israa, and I will leave you to fulfill my duty."

Tears welled in his eyes, and Israa's cries could be heard from her small crib as tears streamed down Mariam's and my mother's faces. I couldn't hold back, and hot tears rolled down my cheeks. My mother, fighting back her tears, said, "You are free, Ibrahim, and no one will stop you from doing what you want. May God protect you," then she took his hand, descended the stairs with him, and gave him his pistol wrapped in a cloth.

In one of the houses in Hebron, the emergency committee of Hamas, led by Jamal with Abd al-Rahman on his right, is meeting. They are planning and organizing the escalation of the Intifada and confrontations in the city and surrounding towns and villages. They agree to work on two fronts: first, to activate the events and incidents wing of the Intifada, and second, to start establishing armed groups and cells and to gather weapons for them.

One of the attendees departs to meet three young men to announce the formation of the core of the armed effort. They are instructed to start searching

for weapons, prepare hideouts and shelters, and nominate candidates ready to engage in this field. Meanwhile, dozens of activists move in various directions to mobilize individuals and supporters to distribute pamphlets, write slogans on walls, and set up barricades on roads to hinder the movement of occupation forces and settlers, drawing them into suitable locations for stone-throwing, thus facilitating the youths' camouflage, withdrawal, and maneuvering.

Abd al-Rahim, in the prime of his youth, meets with two friends in the mosque of Surif village. They sit and plan the next day's activities in the town. Just before dawn, they go out to distribute pamphlets among the houses and shops and write slogans on the walls. Then they start placing barricades and ignite tires, as it is a strike day announced by the resistance statement. They carry out these actions while masked.

One of their colleagues came running to call them to see what was happening. They asked, "What is happening?" He replied, "Come and see!" They found that the slogans they had written were erased, and the name Hamas was crossed out with a warning written beneath it, "Beware of agents, Hamas is an agent of the occupation." They wondered who would do such a thing. He said, "Come on, let's go!" They ran after him and saw three left-wing youths doing it. They got into a fistfight, and fearing their identities would be exposed, they grabbed sticks and batons and went after their targets. They found them there and slapped each one several times. The three ran away, so they chased them to their neighbourhoods and surrounded the area in a dramatic siege, waiting for one of them to come out. Eventually, the elders of the family came out and made peace with the youth on the condition that their children would not do that again.

From the town of Surif, two buses filled with workers who work in Jerusalem's municipality in cleaning, gardening, restoration, and other jobs used to depart daily. These Israeli buses were targeted by the youth in the morning; they ambushed them and pelted them with stones, breaking their windows and forcing them to return without the workers.

When this continued for several days and the Jerusalem municipality could not do without the workers, two military jeeps came with the buses, one in front and one behind, providing a greater opportunity for the youth to attack the soldiers.

Thus, every day the confrontations started at six o'clock and sometimes lasted for hours. Eventually, it seems the Israeli company operating the buses refused to continue after two buses were burned. They hired two buses from an Arab

company, and stone-throwing continued, forcing them to bring in military guards because the municipality needed the work to continue, and the confrontations persisted.

Sometimes, when Abdul Rahim and his brothers were not satisfied with just that, they would go to the main road leading to Beit Shemesh, where they would start pelting Israeli cars with stones, breaking their windows, and disrupting traffic on the road. Occupation army forces would come, and they would attack them with stones and then flee to the mountains they knew as well as their own homes, spending the rest of their day playing and running there.

The confrontations were escalating, activities were intensifying, martyrs were falling and their numbers increasing, and the wounded were beyond imagination. The occupation was undeterred, and the world remained inactive.

In one of the demonstrations that took place at Al-Aqsa Mosque, the occupation forces attacked the protesters using heavy machine guns and helicopters, resulting in dozens of martyrs and hundreds of wounded, and a curfew was imposed on the areas fearing a massive backlash. During the curfew, a young man, not yet twenty, resolved to take revenge with the sharp edge of his knife. He waited, and on the first day the curfew was lifted, he took his knife hidden among his food and boarded the bus as usual when he went to work in Jerusalem. He got off away from his workplace to look for a suitable target; his steps led him to one of the synagogues, and for a moment he thought that the best response to the Al-Aqsa massacre would be against the worshippers there, but he refrained, as he was not one to storm a place of worship to kill those in prayer.

He moved on and found a man, pulled out his knife, and stabbed him several times, leaving him dead. He proceeded and found a female soldier in her uniform; he stabbed her multiple times, and she fell dead. As he advanced, people noticed him and began to gather and scream for help. A soldier in special forces uniform drew his pistol and shouted at him to stop and drop the knife, but he continued advancing towards him. The soldier's hand holding the pistol trembled, he gripped it with both hands, and still trembling, he fired and hit him in the legs, aiming for the chest. His legs became heavy, hit by three shots each, bleeding profusely, yet he continued advancing. The soldier with his weapon and uniform could no longer stand and collapsed.

Only two or three steps away, Amer pushed his legs as if they were stuck in the mud, took another step to reach him, but couldn't, and the other trembled in

fear. Amer, convinced he couldn't advance further, threw himself forward and stabbed the soldier once, twice, thrice, leaving him dead despite his weapon, and Amer was arrested with his head held high.

Two young men in their early twenties came to the camp's mosque looking for Ibrahim. They sat with him in one corner of the mosque and talked quietly for a while then left him early in the morning. He waited for them with his car to take them to the car park heading for work inside the occupied territories of 1948, up to occupied Jaffa. They reached the gate of the workshop where one of them worked, waited for the owner and the other workers, one of them came, opened the gate, and they entered after him, pulled out their knives and started stabbing him. The second worker came, and they killed him, then the workshop owner arrived, and they killed him, and decided to withdraw from the place, not before one of them wrote on the interior wall using spray paint (In memory of the launch of Hamas and as a tribute to the souls of our heroic people's martyrs), and they left the place.

A young man agrees with one of his cousins, who steals cars from Jews, to bring him a large and heavy vehicle. He receives it after the dawn prayer and drives it to Tel Aviv, near Tel Hashomer Hospital. There, a large number of soldiers are waiting at a bus station specifically for military personnel. He accelerates the truck to its maximum speed and then swerves into the station, killing three soldiers and injuring dozens. Similar incidents recur.

Another young man attacks several people sitting at a bus station with his knife, killing four. Another attacks students exiting their school with a hatchet, killing one and injuring many. These incidents multiply, and Israeli politicians and security officials start talking about a "Knife Intifada," creating a state of panic and terror in their streets. A few individuals manage to bring the battle into the residential areas of the enemy, aiming to cause fatalities among them, rather than just sacrificing their own as martyrs while waiting for the world’s conscience to awaken, which is mired in apathy. The pursuit of weapons becomes a top priority for many.

One of the youths passes information to Ibrahim that an informant, who has not fled and lives on the outskirts of a town, has a weapon. He leaves and returns with it at fixed times every day. It is suggested that he be attacked with bladed weapons, killed, and his weapon seized. It is proposed to ambush him, and the youth states he can carry out this plan with others who are ready to assist.

Ibrahim asks him to wait until a pistol is provided since another group has taken it for an operation. Seven masked youths armed with knives ambush the informant when he drives by the specified location. A car blocks his way, and they attack him with their knives, injuring him. However, he swiftly pulls out an Uzi rifle with one hand and starts firing at the youths while manically driving away from the ambush site. One of the youths falls as a martyr.

Later, "Emad," who Ibrahim met in the Negev detention centre, returns to tell him about the incident, tears falling from his eyes. He swears not to sleep that night until he has secured a weapon for them. He drives to Rafah, meets one of the youths who takes him to another. This third person asks him to wait, and returns an hour later with something wrapped in a burlap sack. Inside the car, when the wrapping is removed, it reveals an AK-47 rifle. He kisses it between the eyes and heads back where Emad is waiting. He hands Emad the burlap sack saying, "Now you can operate safely." Emad takes it, barely touching the ground with his feet, to his companions. They take the AK-47 to a remote area to test it and learn how to use it, as this is their first time handling a rifle. Despite their efforts, they struggle with no success.

Emad returns to Ibrahim to complain that the rifle is faulty. Ibrahim takes it and drives to one of the youths who knows about weapons and has experience. The youth examines the rifle twice, disassembles it, and confirms that it's faulty because its firing pin is worn out and needs a new one. Ibrahim asks where they could get one. The youth suggests they need a lathe workshop to make a new one. Ibrahim thanks him and sets off, as the solution seems straightforward since "Hassan" owns a workshop that could do the job.

They take the rifle to the workshop after hiding it, and remove the part that needs repairing. After much effort, a replacement firing pin is made. It's tested and found to be not quite right; it's late, and going back to the workshop again might raise suspicion and cause problems, so they decide to wait till the next day. After several trials and adjustments, the pin finally fits properly. However, they face a new problem: the existing bullets are too few to be useful for training or to carry out an operation. This lone rifle is passed through dozens of hands in various groups across different regions of the Gaza Strip, from the south to the centre and the north.

With the only pistol Ibrahim has, two youths go out; one drives a Peugeot 404, a common type in the Strip, and the other sits beside him on the main road in central Gaza Strip, west of Deir al-Balah, near Kfar Darom settlement. A senior

settler driving to inspect the agricultural land of the settlement stops at a traffic light. The youths' car speeds towards him, stops next to him, and at a distance of thirty centimeters, the passenger shoots him in the head with a single bullet, killing him instantly, and the car speeds away.

As dozens of military jeeps rushed to surround the area, they failed to notice that the perpetrators had slipped through just moments before. Ibrahim and others were always on the lookout for any hint or rumor of someone possessing a weapon, no matter how old. They received news that an elderly man had hidden a Carl Gustaf rifle since the day the Israeli occupation began in Gaza. They pleaded earnestly with the old man, and Ibrahim, kissing his head and hands, offered him any sum of money. The man denied having any weapons.

They began to leave when the man called them back. He led them to a nearby orchard, dug under a tree, and pulled out a concrete pipe filled with soil. He emptied the soil and removed a nylon-wrapped object. Beneath the nylon was a burlap sack, and beneath that, a cloth-wrapped long rifle preserved in grease to protect against rust and moisture. Despite being buried for over two and a half decades, the rifle was corroded but still in good condition. "What do you want for it? How much do you ask?" Ibrahim inquired impatiently. Tears welled up in the old man's eyes as he said, "Its price is very high! It must be used rightly in resistance against the occupation. I've paid the price by preserving it and not handing it over to intelligence, enduring months of brutal interrogation and years in prison." Ibrahim embraced him, promising they would indeed use it as intended, and asked for his blessings. They left as the old man looked to the heavens, praying, "God, grant them victory and guide their aim."

A new round began to gather ammunition from one person to another, until they found several rounds at the sixth contact. They continued from one individual to another, accumulating just enough ammunition to fill a magazine and a half.

The search for someone skilled in weapon handling ended with a young man who had recently returned from studying abroad, where he had undergone military training. He was willing to train and participate. Ibrahim arranged to meet him the next day on Omar Mukhtar Street by the Monument of the Unknown Soldier. He took him from there to an orchard where four young men awaited training. The expert stood, explaining the shooting stances and techniques.

Emad was holding the Carl Gustaf, flipping it between his hands, barely containing his excitement. The trainer marked a target on the trunk of a lemon

tree for them to aim at. As Emad took aim with the rifle, several shots accidentally fired past the young trainer's head, nearly killing him. This caused confusion and tension, but after some time, calm was restored. The trainer resumed the session, taking precautions to allow only one shot per person due to the limited ammunition, which had been inadvertently wasted.

Meanwhile, other members of the group were busy preparing for more robust actions. Some were cutting the heads off matches with nail clippers, accumulating them in a box. Another was preparing a new metal box, sawing it lengthwise and crosswise to weaken its structure, turning it into easily dispersible fragments upon detonation. They filled it with the match heads and inserted a tungsten filament from a broken light bulb, sealing the box after arranging the electrical wires attached to the filament. They set out to plant this improvised explosive device on a dirt road, with one holding the wire ends and a battery ready.

Elsewhere, others ignited several tires and began setting up barricades a considerable distance from the IED location. As a patrol car approached, they engaged it with stones while it fired back at them. As the patrol advanced towards the IED, Emad connected the wires to the battery terminals. A loud explosion followed, with dense smoke and the screams of soldiers filling the air. The group withdrew from the area as reinforcements and ambulances arrived to tend to the injured, whose cries echoed in the turmoil.

Chapter Twenty-Three

From the first moments after Israa, the daughter of Ibrahim and Mariam, brought light into their lives, I noticed that my mother treated her with special affection and care, much more than she did with Mahmoud's and Hassan's children. I couldn't figure out why she showed such particular love, perhaps it stemmed from her special feelings towards Ibrahim, having raised him from infancy like one of her own. This love was magnified because Israa was also her granddaughter from her daughter, thus receiving a dual portion of affection, more than any other grandchild. This was because Israa was both her daughter's child and her son's child. If not for my special love and respect for Ibrahim, and my belief that he deserved such affection, I might have envied him for the love and attention my mother gave him, even though he wasn't her biological son like me.

She often cradled Israa in her arms, rocking and playing with her while improvising songs that women traditionally sang to soothe children to sleep or to stop their crying. She frequently sang a refrain that went, "Bring my handkerchief, you who stand by the door... Bring my handkerchief, so I can return to my homeland, you who stand by the door... to see my loved ones, you standing at the door... to see my loved ones," continuing to improvise in this pattern.

However, after a particular incident with Ibrahim, she changed the word "handkerchief" in her song to "gunpowder," and it became her constant refrain: "Bring the gunpowder, you who stand by the door... Bring the gunpowder, to liberate my country, you who stand by the door... to honor my loved ones, you standing at the door... to honor my loved ones."

I loved these chants sung by my mother, and felt they breathed through our hopes and dreams. I often found an excuse to go upstairs and bring Israa to her, just to start her singing while I pretended to be busy with something else or reading a book, letting the words caress my spirit and soul.

Meanwhile, Ibrahim was sitting with several young men, including Emad, planning an attack on a fruit and vegetable packaging factory in Shuja'iyya, where dozens of Arab workers were employed under the supervision of the Jewish owners who felt secure and at peace.

The young men climbed into a white Peugeot 504, one of them armed with a Karl Gustav rifle loaded with just a few precious bullets—no more were available. Two others carried commando knives, and the fourth drove the car as they sped toward Shuja'iyya, pushing past it to the factory entrance. The car stormed into the large yard filled with workers and goods, screeching to a halt. The three leaped out, the one with the rifle commanding the Arab workers to step aside and not to interfere, shouting at them to comply as they reluctantly obeyed. The other two attacked the Jewish owners with their knives; their cries and pleas for mercy rose sharply. The mission was completed within two or three minutes, and they quickly drove away. Soon after, large forces arrived to comb the area and interrogate those present, and hours later, a statement was released, declaring the operation a gift to the new Israeli Chief of Staff, Ehud Barak, in celebration of his appointment.

Days later, Ibrahim received new information about a Jew who came to collect vegetables from the agricultural areas north of Gaza City. After verifying the information, the group armed with the Karl Gustav rifle and a pistol set out to intercept him. They waited until his arrival, scheduled for the time when he would stop to buy produce from the farmers at the lowest prices. One of the young men approached him, calling out, "Kohen!" As he turned, responding with a weak "Yes?" in Arabic, three bullets penetrated his head, killing him instantly. The young man got back into the car, which sped away, soon passing dozens of military vehicles rushing toward the scene of the crime, a similar incident, and a fourth one. News flew across the butchered homeland, and crowds emerged, chanting praises for the battalions: "Battalions of Izz ad-Din... Battalions... Battalions."

Meanwhile, the enemy's leaders convened, their madness peaking as they began paying a heavy price in lives, something that drove them insane. Each hammered the table, screaming at their subordinates that these men must be controlled or killed to stop the ongoing attacks. Given the nature of the region and the conflict, the responsibility fell on the intelligence service to seek out these young men amidst the cohesive population, like searching for a needle in a haystack. They began to mobilize and direct their agents to gather any information that might provide a lead to reach them or some of them.

Dozens of military vehicles crammed with occupation soldiers ravaged the earth on their way to the Sabra neighbourhood in Gaza City. They surrounded one of the houses and evacuated the area's residents, beginning to call out through

loudspeakers for those inside the house to leave immediately. A helicopter hovered above the scene. Inside, three young men wanted by the occupation forces hid in one of the rooms, while a Palestinian family went about their normal life in the rest of the house.

The homeowner rushed to them asking, "What should we do?" One of the young men quickly responded, "You leave the house, and we will handle the situation." The man protested, "How can we leave while you are still here?" The three young men smiled reassuringly and each grabbed a homemade pipe bomb stuffed with match heads, while one of them also held a pistol. "You must leave so the children and women are not harmed. Go, and we will manage," they insisted, pushing him out of the room. He exited with his children and other family members, his throat repeating the prayer, "There is no power and no strength except with Allah," and reciting verse 9 from Surah Ya-Sin: "And We have put before them a barrier and behind them a barrier and covered them, so they do not see." As they left the house, they were met by the occupation soldiers with rifles pointed at their faces. The adults were taken for interrogation nearby, and the children were detained elsewhere.

Inside the house, the three young men positioned themselves strategically—one holding his pistol and the others each gripping a matchbox bomb in one hand and a lighter in the other, ready for the breach. Outside, dozens of heavily armed soldiers prepared to storm the house. They forced the door open, and as the first soldiers entered, one of the young men lit his bomb and threw it at the entrance. The explosion erupted with a loud noise, screams from the soldiers followed, and those who were not injured retreated. The cries of the wounded filled the air, then the soldiers regrouped and stormed in again under a barrage of gunfire. They managed to drag out the injured and continued their assault amidst a flurry of bullets. Then, a distinctive sound of a single pistol shot rang out, killing one of the soldiers. This prompted a fierce response as dozens of rifles opened fire on the shooter. Another bomb was thrown, exploding and causing more screams followed by more gunfire. After some time, the soldiers emerged, carrying more injured and the bodies of the martyrs. They also took the homeowner into custody.

After the rapid escape of the Peugeot 504 from the entrance of the Israeli police headquarters in Gaza City, where an explosive device was thrown and shots fired from a Karl Gustav rifle and a pistol, the screams of the guards were soon drowned out by the barrage of returning fire as the car sped away. In response,

the occupation's intelligence services and forces intensified their pursuit of the mujahideen, succeeding in another campaign of assassinations and eliminations, which was undeniably based on extensive intelligence operations, primarily carried out by spies. This also included widespread arrests of anyone remotely suspected of being involved in the operations or of providing aid to those involved.

Forces frequently surrounded neighbourhoods to raid houses suspected of hiding mujahideen or deployed special forces in alleys or orchards for targeted assassinations. It became clear that continuing under these conditions—with a lack of weapons and constant harassment from occupation forces—was unsustainable.

In one of the meetings that included Ibrahim with some mujahideen, a suggestion was made to escape across the border to Egypt as staying in the country was akin to suicide. Ibrahim and the majority present opposed the idea of leaving the occupied land. Faced with the need for another solution, Ibrahim suggested that as many of them as possible move to the West Bank, where they could rejuvenate their efforts, find a brief respite, and possibly source more weapons than were available in Gaza. Some still insisted on the idea of escaping to Egypt, and it was agreed that those who wished to leave should do so if possible.

Several identity cards were forged for mujahideen who began using them to move from Gaza to the West Bank. Eight known and wanted figures managed to reach the Ramallah area, where university students helped them rent apartments under the guise of being students themselves, facilitating their stay without arousing suspicion or curiosity.

In Gaza, others endeavored to escape to Egypt via the border where they were smuggled into the areas occupied since 1948. Here, a Bedouin guide took them deep into the Negev Desert, where security was laxer on the border with Egypt, eventually smuggling them into Egypt. Some managed to evade capture, but others were apprehended by Egyptian security forces and imprisoned. After some time, they were released on condition they leave Egypt, and they subsequently departed for Sudan.

Those who moved to the West Bank began engaging with students there to establish connections with mujahideen across the West Bank. Emad, Bashar, and Mohammed encountered several well-known students at Hebron University, who were in study circles led by Jamal, Abd al-Rahman, Youssef, Yakub, Abed, and Saif, who were preparing to initiate armed operations in the southern West Bank.

At their first meeting, Emad immediately inquired about the availability of weapons. The students smiled and reassured him, obtaining weapons was not difficult, but Emad insisted on acquiring them immediately, to which one laughed and cautioned him, recognizing the fiery spirit typical of Gazans.

As the young men from Gaza wandered the streets of Ramallah and Hebron, they marveled at the luxurious stone houses that looked like palaces, remarking that the stones decorating one palace could feed their camp for six months. They were astonished to see a young boy driving a black Mercedes-Benz (1992 model) by himself, which sparked a conversation about the wealth in the area. Yakub joked about the wealth, noting that some locals were multimillionaires who didn't even know the full extent of their riches. Emad, ever focused on their mission, mused that the price of such a car could finance the purchase of ten Kalashnikov rifles, which could dramatically escalate their capabilities. Yakub laughed, appreciating Emad's single-minded focus on arming their group, while Emad lamented the plight of their brethren in Gaza who faced frequent Israeli assaults without sufficient arms to defend themselves effectively.

The reinforcements arrived, besieged, arrested, and interrogated. The next day, the enemy's press spoke of the unparalleled audacity and the soldiers who sat in Gaza like training dummies.

Days later, the mujahideen targeted a new objective. An Israeli bus returning workers from the Rafah customs crossing on the Egyptian border was passing by when they opened fire on it with bursts of bullets. Days after, they attacked another military jeep. Curfews were imposed, arrests and investigations followed, all to no avail. At the first opportunity after the curfew was lifted, the mujahideen awaited a target and opened fire. Israeli analysts then confirmed that Gaza had become a black hole for Israel. Some politicians dared to demand an unconditional withdrawal from Gaza, dismantling its settlements, building a separation wall around it, and leaving it to manage on its own.

The mujahideen were driving their car on Omar Al-Mukhtar Street in Gaza when two border patrol vehicles started chasing them. Emad asked the driver to turn off the street and onto Al-Wehda Street. The border patrol vehicles split; one continued the pursuit, and the other went to flank them, clearly intending to trap them. The driver panicked, and the car's wheels hit the curb. The border patrol jeep stopped a few meters away, and two soldiers alighted, brandishing their rifles and ordering those in the car to come out with their hands up. Emad, sitting in the front seat, quickly pulled out a rifle and opened fire through the rear window

at the soldiers and the vehicle, his companions also returning fire. After a brief exchange, the driver sped away from the scene, escaping what could have been certain death.

Three mujahideen, under the cover of night, crawled with their rifles through the soft, cold yellow sand around the settlement of Anem Tal north of Khan Younis. They dug under the barbed wire just before dawn, hiding among the greenhouses, waiting for their target. Moments later, a military jeep with a searchlight patrolling the perimeter of the settlement approached. As soon as it was within range, they opened fire. The jeep veered forward a few meters, then stopped. The men approached to confirm the soldiers were incapacitated and to retrieve their weapons, then retreated to their waiting vehicle.

In occupied Jerusalem, four young men from the surrounding towns plan a distinctive operation. They drive their cars, armed with some bladed weapons and ropes, to the occupied city of Lod just before dawn. A Border Guard soldier is on his way from his home to his base, walking along the road. The driver accelerates the car, swerves slightly to hit the soldier, knocking him to the ground. The others quickly get out, lift him into the car, conceal him, lock the vehicle, and speed off to complete their mission. They drop a media statement at the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross, giving the Israeli government 24 hours to release Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and other prisoners in exchange for the release of the soldier, "Nassim Tolledano," guaranteed by European diplomats.

The reaction of "Yitzhak Rabin," the Israeli Prime Minister, and his army and intelligence leaders was frantic. Thousands of soldiers scrambled, searching, setting up checkpoints, and checking every passerby in a hysterical manner. When the 24 hours passed without the Rabin government complying with their demands, the young men executed the soldier and threw his body in a nearby ravine to show Rabin that their threats were serious. The Israeli government convened with senior military and security leaders to discuss the severe security developments, as the frequency and scale of the attacks grew and their human losses doubled day by day.

Under the cover of night, across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in every city, town, and village, thousands of officers and intelligence agents, along with tens of thousands of soldiers with hundreds of vehicles, carried out a massive arrest campaign against all activists of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. A total of four hundred and fifteen leaders and activists were

blinded, handcuffed, and loaded onto buses. The buses traveled north for hours to the Lebanese border.

There, they were transferred to Lebanese trucks belonging to the South Lebanon Army and taken deeper into southern Lebanon to the security zone. They were unloaded at the border and ordered to walk forward or be shot. The group halted on the other side and decided not to move unless it was back to their homes, realizing this was a mass deportation operation. They sat in the cold, under rain and hunger, unmoving, and started their media and political battle to pressure Israel to allow their return. Over time, the good people of Lebanon, including organizations, associations, parties, and individuals, came to support them, providing for their needs until they could return.

Hassan was among those deported, and they had intended to deport Ibrahim as well, but he wasn't at home, so he escaped deportation and arrest. In just a few days, the news of the deportees to Marj al-Zuhur in Lebanon became the talk of every Palestinian home and every gathering. Immediately, new cells of mujahideen prepared for immediate martyrdom operations to show the Israeli government and military leaders the failure of their plan, affirming that the mujahideen still filled the paths of the homeland.

Emad and his brothers took their cars to the eastern road, east of the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood, where many Israeli military vehicles moved. They opened fire on an Israeli officer in his car, leaving it to roll to the side of the road, and then on an Israeli bus that stopped after tens of meters. They threw an empty rifle magazine with a statement for Rabin, threatening and warning of more martyrdom operations, assuring him that his methods would only ignite more resistance.

Several young men who had been targeted for arrest by the occupation forces in the north of the West Bank fled from them and disappeared into the mountains. They gathered together and began searching for weapons, finding some after much difficulty. They prepared an ambush on a rugged mountain road near the village of Burqin. When a military patrol vehicle came, they opened fire, the vehicle crashed into the mountain chain, killing the soldiers inside, and the mujahideen withdrew safely.

In Nablus, one of the surveillance patrols occupying the roof of a high building was monitored for a long time. The time of the soldiers' shift change was noted. Three soldiers came to replace the three at the observation point on the

building's roof. The three young men with knives and bladed weapons hid in the building, waiting for the shift change. The new patrol came, the soldiers from the position left and took the car, departing, and the three new soldiers began to climb the stairs inside the building to the roof, where the mujahideen attacked them with knives and lethal blows, killing them and seizing their weapons.

The special force that had previously kidnapped the soldier "Tolledano," left Jerusalem in their car with an Uzi rifle and a pistol. After midnight, near the Israeli police car stationed for patrol under the street lights near Hadera, the mujahideen's car approached, stopped beside it, and they opened fire on the police officers, returning them dead and taking their pistols before quietly leaving the scene, returning to their homes.

The mujahideen had now acquired several weapons, but their arsenal remained far from sufficient. They were determined to go to great lengths to secure more arms, ready to pay whatever it took. Emad heard about a man who possessed a Kalashnikov and sought an intermediary to purchase it from him. The owner, recognizing the intermediary as someone from Emad's circle—Emad, a symbol of jihad and resistance whose name had become well-known across Palestine—was immediately prepared to sell the rifle.

The intermediary returned and informed Emad that the seller was ready to sell the Kalashnikov at the purchase price, without seeking any profit, for five thousand Jordanian dinars. Ibrahim quickly gathered funds, including borrowing jewelry from his wife Mariam and pooling savings from others, to assemble the amount. They handed it over to the intermediary who returned with the Kalashnikov, which was then warmly embraced by the mujahideen as if it were dearly beloved by each of them.

Days later, by chance, Emad encountered a man while returning from a mission as Israeli forces pursued him and his mujahideen brothers. The man sheltered them from danger. During their stay, the man recognized Emad by the Kalashnikov, revealing that he was the seller. Through conversation, Emad realized there was a discrepancy: either the intermediary who facilitated the purchase had embezzled one thousand five hundred dinars from the mujahideen, or the seller was lying. Emad immediately sent for the intermediary, who was brought to a room for questioning.

Wielding a cane, Emad demanded to know how much had been paid to the seller. The intermediary stammered, unable to respond until faced with the threat

of physical punishment. He finally confessed to paying only three thousand five hundred dinars to the seller, admitting to keeping the rest of the money for himself under the guise of necessity. It was revealed that the seller had originally purchased the rifle for four thousand dinars but sold it at a loss, honoring the jihad and the mujahideen, particularly Emad. The intermediary, who had merely facilitated the transaction and exploited it for personal gain, was given a stern reprimand and a few strikes with the cane. He was also given two weeks to return the embezzled funds or face more severe consequences. This episode highlighted the challenges the mujahideen faced, not only from external threats but also from betrayal within their own ranks.

While intensifying their campaigns of pursuit and interrogation, the mujahideen were often forced to change their hiding places. Consequently, some of their supporters dedicated themselves to finding homes willing to shelter these wanted men for a night, a week, or longer. One such supporter found a willing brother who prepared his home, situated next to those of his three brothers, as a temporary refuge. He strictly instructed his family not to reveal the mujahideen's presence to avoid endangering them. From this safe house, the mujahideen ventured out to carry out one of their operations, ambushing a patrol by the roadside, opening fire before retreating stealthily and camouflaging their entry back into the house.

An hour after their return, the family's patriarch came to his son’s house and sensed the presence of strangers. Sensing his father's suspicions, the son attempted to reassure him by saying he had guests for a very short time. After a few moments of tension, a wide smile spread across the old man's face as he twirled his mustache and said, “Take your ease, young men, your true nature is no secret to someone like me!” The youths were momentarily taken aback, looking at each other in silent astonishment. The elder continued, easing their discomfort, "The smell of gunpowder on your clothes gives you away; you've been shooting a gun within the last hour or two."

Stunned, the young men sunk into deep thought, unsure of what to say next. The elder reassured them, “Feel no embarrassment, by Allah, you are dearer to me than anything in this world.” His gaze then turned to Emad, “You must be Emad? The hero they speak of, who possesses seven lives and has bewildered the

occupiers.” Sweating with embarrassment, Emad muttered, “I am Emad, sir, but...” The elder cut him off, “No buts. Everyone has heard of your bravery. May Allah protect you and your brothers’ hands. Take your ease, heroes. Take your ease.”

The young men felt an unexpected sense of relief and transparency with the old man's comforting words. Emad, curious and somewhat relieved, asked, “But how did you know all this about us, Hajj?” The elder smiled and replied, “Anyone who has tasted the flavor of jihad and inhaled the smell of gunpowder in the fields of manhood will never forget it, my sons. Allah granted me that honor before our land was lost. I smelled the gunpowder on your clothes, and it was appropriate for you to have changed them immediately upon arrival and given them to Mohammad’s wife to wash right away. Do that next time.” Amused by his own deductions, Emad smiled and asked, “But how did you know I am Emad?” The elder explained, “I've heard about your operations from the youths and in the news, and imagined in my mind the eyes of that mujahid. When I saw you and smelled the gunpowder, I recognized you from your eyes. Eyes don't lie, Emad. Eyes don't lie, my son.”

At that moment, Mohammed entered saying: "There's a signal that the occupation forces are approaching the neighbourhood." The mujahideen quickly rose, saying: "Get our weapons and let's leave this place." The elder jumped up shouting: "Where to? Where?" Emad replied, "Let's hide away so as not to cause harm to the children and buildings." The elder frowned, his face tightened, and he shouted, "Are the children and buildings more precious than you? No, by Allah, you will not leave this place. If it turns out they are on their way here, each of you should ascend to one of my sons' four buildings, fortify yourselves within, and do not surrender. Fire at them with everything you've got, and what happens will be as Allah decrees." Emad tried to interrupt, "But, old man..." The elder shouted: "Enough, Emad, enough! By Allah, you will not leave this house while I am alive in a moment of danger. Besides, we still do not know whether they are coming for us specifically or if it is just a routine patrol. Sit down, sit down until we see." He left the house to check things himself. While the mujahideen prepared for confrontation, the elder returned, saying: "They've gone, it was just a normal patrol and has nothing to do with you. Sit down, sit down and tell me about your operations. Come, Emad, sit next to me here."

My brother Mohammed noticed that his chemistry student was digging through his books for something specific that was troubling him and approached him

asking what he was searching for. The young man appeared embarrassed and stammered, "Nothing, nothing." Mohammed smiled and said, "My man, don't say 'nothing.' Tell me you don't want my help, because you're searching for something that's bothering you and preoccupying you." The young man looked at him again and said, "Truthfully, you are right, I am looking for something specific, but never mind, I will manage on my own." Mohammed smiled and said, "Let me help you. You're looking for a specific equation, and it's on page number (131) in the book." The young man was stunned, looking at him in astonishment as he flipped through the book. "How could you possibly know what I'm searching for?" Mohammed smiled and replied: "Open the page and see if you really found what you were looking for, didn't you?" The young man turned to the mentioned page, his astonishment grew, and he could not hide it, asking, "How did you know, for God's sake?" Mohammed answered: "A young man like you diligently searching for a specific issue, and getting flustered when I ask, suggests you're not looking for something trivial. If you were searching for something mundane, you would have answered without hesitation. Moreover, eyes do not lie, Yahya, your eyes tell what's within you, despite the calm and stillness you project. Some might think a cat is eating your food due to your extreme quietness, but inside you is a raging storm." Yahya smiled and muttered: "Believe me, I am not as..." Mohammed laughed and said: "I believe you, I do."

Chapter Twenty-Four

I graduated from university with a bachelor's degree in geology from the Faculty of Science. I applied for a job with the agency and waited for a response while working in construction as a full partner with Ibrahim, who spent less time at work than I did. However, in the short time he was there, he produced as much as I did with much effort. I was completely satisfied with our partnership, not just because he was my cousin, childhood friend, and my sister's husband, nor just because I knew he was absent from work due to his excellent national role in organizing and supporting the resistance. Above all, it was because he was extremely diligent when he did work, accomplishing in one hour what took me several, especially as he handled the technical and challenging tasks that made everything easier for me and the other workers.

The job wasn't very important to me since working in construction was good, and the income I earned from it was excellent. The only downside was that it required more physical effort and was seen as a job for those without university degrees. However, having a bachelor's degree in geology with very good grades made things easier for me.

My brother Hassan returned from being exiled in Marj al-Zuhur after about a year. It had been agreed that the exiles would be split into two groups: the first to return after about a year, and the second after two years. Hassan was in the first group, and we welcomed him home where well-wishers visited us in droves. Many of them were his friends from the mosque who greeted him with warm handshakes before embracing him fervently several times while his children played around him, delighted by their father's return. Their joy and his happiness increased when one of his friends started playing with one of his kids.

A few days after Hassan's return, there was a clash between a group of mujahideen and the occupation forces on Al-Nasr Street in Gaza City. What was significant about this incident was the martyrdom of one of the mujahideen, and more importantly, this mujahideen was Ibrahim's friend Yasser, who had started working in construction with him.

I don't know how to describe my feelings, Ibrahim's feelings, and the feelings of everyone in the camp. It was a mixture of joy, sorrow, contentment, anger, happiness, and grief.

We were joyous for the victory of a man who chose his path and fulfilled his duty, winning the highest and most precious thing men in our nation's situation could wish for. And we were saddened by the departure of a man whose absence felt like a void not easily filled by another. Upon hearing the news, a sharp tear fell on Ibrahim's cheek, which he quickly wiped away, trying to hide it before saying: "Praise be to Allah who honored him with martyrdom. Indeed, Yasser deserved it. We ask Allah to accept him among the righteous and the martyrs." Then we rushed out to fulfill our duty, to stand with his family. We erected a large tent covered with a canvas and brought chairs to sit with some of his family and neighbours to receive the mourners. I saw his mother and wife in a strange state too, fighting back tears with my mother by their side, trying to comfort her instead of the other way around, and one of them said: "Praise be to Allah, he achieved the highest of his desires... Praise be to Allah. And he always emphasized to us not to cry for him, saying: 'Martyrs should not be cried over nor mourned in their funerals; they should be bid farewell with ululations and their families should be congratulated on their martyrdom.'" So the women's ululations began, and I couldn't hold back my tears, amazed by this situation they were in. Our people were used to mourning martyrs, but now they bid them farewell with ululations, and even more astonishing, they distributed baklava to those who came for the condolences, leaving the mourners confused whether to repeat words of condolences or congratulations and blessings.

While we were in the mourning tent, a large convoy of cars and military vehicles from the occupation forces raided the place, ramming some vehicles into the tent, destroying it, and breaking some chairs. This sparked fierce confrontations between the crowd and the occupation forces. After their departure, we re-erected the tent, and the flow of mourners returned as before, uninterrupted.

That day, large colored pictures of the martyr were distributed, and people vied to receive one. Many pasted them on the walls of the alleyways in the camp, so you couldn't walk down an alley without his image in front of you. Many framed the pictures and hung them at the front of their guest rooms. As for Ibrahim, he didn't hang the picture, and when I asked why he didn't hang his close friend's picture, he said it's hung deep within my soul, Ahmad. His wife was pregnant and he said: "If I am blessed with a son, I will name him Yasser, God willing."

Yahya leaves Birzeit at the end of the week, returning to his village. After seeing his family, he goes out for the afternoon prayer in the village mosque. There he

meets a friend and leaves with him to meet some of the pursued mujahideen living in the village.

They sat in that room in the basement of one of the houses, and Yahya began to explain that after some research, he had found a way to create a type of explosive... They screamed in admiration, shock, and appreciation, and some of them couldn't believe it. Yahya continued, saying that the basic materials needed for the preparation were readily available and easy to obtain, which were a type of chemical fertilizer and acetone. Immediately, some went out to bring the necessary materials. Yahya and two of his brothers busied themselves with preparing the substance, mixing the materials gently, from which strong fumes emanated, prompting one to leave for fresh air, while Yahya persisted without leaving his task.

After the materials were ready, they filled them into an iron cylinder and carried the three of them to an open area between the mountains. There, they broke the glass of an electric bulb, inserted the stuffing material inside the cylinder, and extended an electric wire through it. They retreated dozens of meters away, bowed their heads, inserted their fingers into their ears, and Yahya placed the ends of the wires on the poles of the battery. But nothing happened; there was no explosion, big or small.

His companions looked at each other and at him as if to say: What happened, and why didn't the explosion occur that you've been talking about so much? One of them ran towards the device to kick it, but Yahya screamed at him, making him understand the seriousness of the situation and not to be reckless. He disconnected the wires from the battery and took a long stick, stripped of its leaves, creeping closer with sweat dripping from his forehead, pushing it with the stick several times while still lying flat on his stomach without raising his head, pushing it several times until he was sure it wasn't ready to explode. Then he sat up, supported by his arms.

Then his companions came and sat next to him to examine the situation and found that the igniting wire (tungsten) had been cut. Yahya smiled, saying, "Didn't I tell you... So, it's just a technical fault." One of his companions flew to town to prepare this time two large bulbs; they broke their glass and placed the wires so that if one failed, the other would perform the required function. They connected the wire, retreated, and lay hidden behind a rock formation. Yahya smiled, saying, "Now, close your ears," and as soon as they closed their ears, he placed the ends of the wire on the poles of the battery. The sound of the explosion was

thunderous, and it was followed by flying rock fragments from the explosion site. The three of them ran to leave the place before the occupation forces and their intelligence could arrive at the sound of the explosion, and his companions kissed and hugged him. Zahdi said, "Now we will prepare many devices and place them on the patrol route to show them hell."

Yahya smiled and said, "No, we won't place them on the patrol path!" Zahdi looked at him in surprise, "Then where will we place them? And why did we go through all this effort if we're not going to use them in our operations against the occupation?" Yahya smiled again and said, "This occupier who has been killing us for years since the beginning of the Intifada without any mercy or regard for the blood of the martyrs, whether men or women, adults or children, and even did not spare infants, must pay the heaviest price possible. They must now understand that we are capable of striking at their core. We must deliver blows beneath the belt, to the abdomen and face, and not just to the fortified and armored limbs." Zahdi asked, "Do you mean that we should carry out operations inside [Israel]?" Yahya replied with a smile, "Yes, selective quality operations, very strong to counterbalance the killing operations committed by the occupiers over the years, when we had nothing but stones and sticks."

Yahya dedicated himself to preparing the materials, and Zahdi went searching for a target. They found some young people who knew of a nightclub where hundreds of Israelis gathered on Friday evenings, many of whom returned from their military units serving in the territories. The devices were prepared and loaded onto a car, and two of the young men set off with them towards the target site. When they approached the target, there was a traffic accident and unusual police movement. The driver panicked, thinking that the movement was meant for them, and then the police appeared, and a chase ensued in the streets. 'Abd al-Ra'uf then screamed, "Ah, if only the devices were ready to explode now," while his companion shouted, "The important thing is that we escape now, or at least one of us does." Then he shouted on the first turn, "I'll slow down, open the door, and throw yourself out of the car, and pretend you were walking along the roadside." 'Abd al-Ra'uf replied, "And you, the important thing is you escape, and I'll try the least of it is one of us escapes."

The prisons and detention centres were crowded with prisoners and detainees, forcing the occupation authorities to open more. One of these detention centres was the Dahariya prison, surrounded by barbed wire, watchtowers, and heavy

machine guns. Its tents were bustling with detainees, burning for freedom and rejoining the Intifada and resistance outside the detention centre.

Not far from it, one of the young men hid behind a barrier and took out a wire cutter from his pocket, tying it to a thin but strong rope about a meter long. He held one end of the rope, with the cutter dangling from the other end, and began to spin it forcefully in the manner of a slingshot. As it gained speed, moving towards the detention centre, he let go of the end he was holding, and the cutter flew to fall inside the opposite courtyard...

Inside one of the tents, a pair of eyes watched the direction with caution and determination, waiting for the signal from outside that the mission was accomplished. In the pitch darkness, a very faint light flashed twice, then the hand of the eyes' owner covered his mouth as he whispered dreamily, "Praise be to Allah, praise be to Allah."

As dawn broke, Jihad was sitting up in his bed, having not slept all night, pretending to sleep but his eyes never left that courtyard. With the end of the count and as the young men moved to the square to relieve themselves and wash their faces, he was the first to reach the square. His eyes scanned the area, then he bent down to pick up the wire cutters from the ground, concealing it in his clothes, and merged with the crowd in the square. With the evening darkness and the onset of night, he crept towards the wires at one of the secluded points, not well-exposed to the nearby tower.

He extended his hand, pulled out the wire cutters from his belt, and cut several sections of the barbed wire, creating a gap through which he slipped out. With stealth and agility, four other detainees slipped out after him. A few brief seconds separated them from freedom; they continued crawling until they were away from the prison walls. Once at the first cover, each one jumped to his feet, embracing his companions, racing towards expansive freedom.

Before dawn, three of these young men had reached the outskirts of Hebron and found one of their acquaintances who would send them to a place of hiding, secure some food and drink, and shelter for them, then left to look for their comrades who had disappeared after attempts by the occupation forces to arrest them. By evening, those brothers had arrived at the place, hiding their friends with their rifles in hand... One embraced the other warmly, and they embraced their rifles even more fervently, sitting down to prepare for the next day.

The phenomenon of killing collaborators or those suspected of collaborating with the occupation's intelligence continued; every so often one would be killed and their body displayed or crucified, and sometimes whipped, where they would be strung up in a public square to be lashed or executed.

Voices among the intellectuals began to rise, calling for a re-evaluation of this issue and to halt it. Although the fighters in the resistance field were convinced of the validity and necessity of its continuity for justified considerations—believing that anyone who collaborates with the occupation must be killed—or for pragmatic considerations where the resistance's continuity and success greatly depended on cleansing the society of collaborators. In more precise terms, the success and sustainability of the resistance greatly relied on uprooting the occupier's eyes through which they see us from within.

A great debate erupted in all forums about this issue... The supportive side presents the two previous considerations, while the opposition believes that there is a great exaggeration in this matter, and that it is an internal self-destructive process that must stop. Since there were rising voices demanding the cessation of the Intifada, it was not easy to distinguish between these two voices, which seemed to be the same. It appears that some adopted the viewpoint of stopping both the Intifada and the phenomenon of killing for alleged collaboration with the occupation.

Such debates often arose in the meetings my brother Mahmoud had with his friends in the guest room of our house. To be fair, there was a clear excess in this phenomenon, and what was even more dangerous was the absence of a national reference, and most often, there were no organizational references to make these decisions. The decisions remained in the hands of mostly enthusiastic groups of young people without any supervision from higher responsible authorities. Moreover, any judicial, legal, or human rights oversight was completely absent from the matter... And some of those knowledgeable and informed about the issues, like Mahmoud, would propose such ideas. However, it was clear that implementing this was closer to impossible due to subjective considerations within the resistance, its factions and cells and their differences, as well as objective considerations in the conditions imposed by the occupation, accompanied by arrests, assassinations, and the silencing of opinion leaders through imprisonment or exile. However, it was clear that continuing the phenomenon without control was a big mistake, and undoubtedly, efforts were not made by officials, intellectuals, and legal experts to find the optimal solution

for the controlled continuation of addressing the phenomenon with the least possible degree of killing, avoiding the grotesque and repugnant image of it.

Emad's name became on everyone's lips and became a symbol of heroism and resistance, to the extent that even the Israeli media began to take a special interest in him, and Israeli Prime Minister Rabin named him "The Ghost" and started pressuring his military and security leaders to capture him.

In response to the growing resistance, the occupying forces began implementing new security measures to maintain their security and safety. It was announced that no Arab-driven car is allowed to overtake or approach an Israeli military vehicle closely, maintaining a distance of at least fifty meters. If Arab vehicles attempted to get close or overtake, they were to be aimed at with guns and fired upon. Any Israeli vehicle moving in the Gaza Strip was forbidden from traveling without military escort. Furthermore, no military vehicle was allowed to move alone; the minimum movement should be by two military vehicles, among other restrictions on citizens, including arrests, raids, and shootings on mere suspicion.

Information about a military patrol of two jeeps moving near the cemetery in Jabalia refugee camp towards the army camp at night was received. Emad and his brothers planned the operation, lying in wait for the jeeps in the camp's alleyways. One of them positioned himself in an alley ahead of the convoy, and two others were in a rear alley, both overlooking the road typically used by the vehicles. They let the first jeep pass by the alley entrance, and before the second jeep reached the entrance of the second alley, the lone brother emerged, firing at the back of the first jeep, while the other two faced the second jeep head-on, coming down to the road and beginning to fire. Being only three meters away from the jeep, the soldiers were unable to return even a single shot. The three soldiers in the second jeep were killed as it veered off the road, and those in the first jeep were wounded. The three withdrew through the narrow alleys to a waiting car on the other side, which whisked them away from the camp.

Reinforcements, curfews, arrests, and interrogations followed as usual, to no avail. Rabin had to cut short his visit to Washington and return immediately upon hearing the news of the operation. The fighters withdrew to Victory Street in Gaza, where Ibrahim was waiting for them in his car. After stashing the car they had used for the operation, they got into Ibrahim's car and headed to a new hideout in the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood, east of Gaza City. Ibrahim got out and knocked on the door, which was answered by a young boy. When he saw Ibrahim, he asked if they had come with him. Ibrahim replied yes, and the boy

ran back inside the house, returning a minute later to warmly welcome them, his face growing redder with time. Then he ran out and came back running, greeting them enthusiastically again. It was clear he didn't know what to do with himself due to the excitement, while Ibrahim looked at his brothers and smiled, and they all smiled back.

The young man sat beside them on the mattress spread on the floor and said, "I am Nidal, welcome, you honor us." Ibrahim responded, "May God increase your honor. You know I am Ibrahim, and this is Ahmad, this is Khalid, and this is Emad." The boy became excited again and said, "You are Emad, welcome, welcome, my mother is preparing dinner for you now, make yourselves at home, relax." Then he got up and ran out to check on the dinner. He soon returned, running from the door, saying, "My mom and dad want you to come to meet you." The fighters looked at Ibrahim, as he was familiar with the people and the one who makes decisions. He nodded in agreement. Nidal ran off and then returned, followed by his father and mother. The man was tall and robust, with a kind face. He greeted and entered, shaking hands with the young men. The mother stood by the door, wrapped in her white garments, her head covered, her demeanor dignified. She did not shake hands but welcomed them limitlessly with her words.

Nidal introduced them to his parents, almost flying with pride for his distinguished guests. The parents welcomed them wholeheartedly. Nidal's mother stepped back, saying she would finish preparing the dinner. "Take your ease, my sons, consider yourselves at home, and whatever food or drink you wish for, just ask... May God protect and keep you," she said as she exited. Abu Nidal sat welcoming the young men, getting to know them.

Nidal's mother returned after a while carrying a tray of food with rice and some small pigeons (squabs) on top. Nidal hurried to take the food from her and place it in front of the guests, insisting, "Please, eat." Nidal's mother exited again, wishing them a hearty and healthy meal. The attendees began to eat, and the food was not only tasty but also dripped with the love that fills the hearts of this average Palestinian family, just like other families towards the resistance and its men. Every time one of the young men showed a sign of stopping, Abu Nidal would offer a new bite, urging them to eat more and then more. They were satisfied and rose to wash their hands, while Nidal carried the tray out to place it before his brothers and mother, who were also having their dinner in another room.

In the interrogation cells at the Moscovia detention centre in Jerusalem, the place bustled with detainees. The jailers pulled one into the interrogation room and returned another from a different room. Interrogators asked, beat, tortured, and threatened to get any information about the resistance activists, or a piece of weaponry.

In one room, an interrogation officer bargained with a young man, saying if he agreed to deal with them, he would be released from prison immediately, and they would drop any sentence the court might impose if he went to trial. After confessions from his brothers, he might be sentenced to ten years. The officer alternated between intimidation and enticement, the young man's face turning redder and redder. A young man with limited life experience could be lured into becoming an agent for the Israeli intelligence. The young man refused, but the intelligence officer pressed on him. In the end, the young man agreed. The intelligence man stood up, shook his hand, and affirmed that they were now friends.

He goes out to bring the fruit and dessert dishes, placing them in front of the young man and his close friend, while a third friend captures the moment as the young man enjoys the fruit next to the officer, who is teasing and laughing with him. The officer then tells him that in a few days he will go to court, from where the judge will decide to release him to make things look reasonable and avoid raising suspicions about him.

He gives him a phone number to call when necessary, and introduces him to an address in Jerusalem, telling him to come there on the first of next month at ten in the morning. He just has to knock on the apartment door and he will find him there, waiting to discuss the information he wants and how to communicate, among other things. "Maher" is released and returns to his home in the 'Aida Camp near Bethlehem. Relatives, neighbours, and friends come to greet and congratulate him on his safety.

As soon as the greetings and congratulations end, he goes to his sheikh and mentor at the mosque and tells him everything, assuring him that he only agreed to teach that fool a lesson he and his agency and leaders will never forget, and that he will kill him. The sheikh nods in agreement.

Maher then goes to his cousin Nasser and Mahmoud to tell them about the plan and ask for their help in executing the mission. They inquire about the location, time, and necessary details, and the three of them are determined to do it.

On the appointed date, the trio set out. Maher holds an ordinary hammer (shakoosh), and the others hold kitchen knives, hiding them inside their clothes. They head to Jerusalem, reach the building, and enter up to the apartment door. Maher stands in front of the door with Nasser on the right and Mahmoud on the left. Maher presses the doorbell, and the intelligence man opens the door smiling, inviting him in. As Maher enters and tells him to close the door behind him, he pulls out the hammer from behind his back and strikes the officer in the back of his head, causing him to collapse to the floor. The three assail him, beating and stabbing him.

They then quietly leave the place as if nothing had happened. Maher flies far away from home because he knows they will come to arrest him. In the evening, the camp is surrounded, a campaign of arrests begins, and the death of the intelligence man is announced.

A large force from the occupation army, led by intelligence officers, raids the village of Rafat and surrounds "Abu Yahya's" house, storming in and shouting, "Where is Yahya... Where is Yahya?" Yahya was not at home; after hearing about what happened with the car carrying the bombs he prepared, he no longer slept at home and only visited rarely and without being seen, leaving quickly. He was hiding at some friends' places. The soldiers searched the house, turned it upside down, confiscated all his books, papers, and tools, and took them out and arrested his father for interrogation.

After days of interrogating Yahya's father, he was released. As for Yahya, he moved to Nablus, disappearing there among some brothers until the storm subsided. Then he began contacting many young men, incorporating them into 'martyrdom' cells, starting operations in cities and towns in the northern West Bank, with groups in Nablus, Anabta, Tubas, and Jenin. Being wanted by the occupying forces, he agreed with each group's leaders to contact him via dead drops, where he set a specific location for exchanging written messages, conveyed to him by an unknown and untargeted young man by the occupation forces.

In the southern West Bank, at the Al-Aroub camp on the main road connecting Bethlehem to Hebron, youths from the camp come to the house of a fellow camp youth, "Mohammed," to celebrate his release after a period of detention in the Negev prison. They offer congratulations and blessings. Once the well-wishers leave and the house empties, and as the movement in the camp decreases, Mohammed puts on his winter jacket and covers his head with a red keffiyeh, sneaking out of the house immediately upon leaving. He wants to hide his face so

no one recognizes him if they meet him on the road. He reaches a house, knocks on the door gently in a consistent pattern. The door opens, and "Khaled," a young man in his early twenties with a light beard adding elegance to his appearance, answers. Khaled asks if he should bring out the car. Mohammed replies: "Yes, quickly, we don't have much time." Khaled drives out his car, Mohammed sits next to him, and they head south towards Hebron, passing through Hebron centre and continuing westward, leaving Hebron towards the town of Beit Awwa.

Khaled stops at one of the houses and walks to its door, knocking on it. A young man opens the door, and Khaled speaks a few words with him before a man comes out of the house to greet Khaled. After talking briefly, Khaled returns to the car with the man. They get into the car, and Khaled drives off, directing the man on which route to take. He then points to a nearby house, saying, "Stop here," and gets out of the car, telling the others, "Wait here for a bit while I check things out." He knocks on the door, it opens, and someone looks out and talks with him before he returns to the car, asking Khaled and Mohammed to come down and join him in the house.

They enter the house and go into one of the rooms where five young men are sitting, two of whom had escaped from Majdo prison a while ago. When they see Mohammed, they jump to their feet to greet and embrace him. Everyone sits down, and one of them asks, "When were you released?" Khaled replies, "Today," prompting laughter from the group. One of them jokes, "Mohammed is on fire, he couldn't even wait till tomorrow," to which Mohammed smiles and says, "How could I wait? If it weren't for my love for the people and my appreciation for their coming to greet me, I would have left them at home and come right after greeting my father and brothers." The youths laugh, and one of them says teasingly, "Take it easy, Abu Rashid." Mohammed replies, "The important thing is that, thankfully, I found you right away. What's the news? What do you have? How many fighters do we have? What about the ammunition? The shelters? How ready are people to shelter you? Are there any specific targets to hit? What? How? When?" The young men smile, waiting for him to pause from his flurry of questions.

One of the youths, with a smile that never left his lips, said, "Our situation is good, commander, very good. We were just waiting for you to join us," and he began to detail the latest news they had.

"I got the job acceptance at the preparatory school for refugees, where I started working. Immediately, my mother began talking to me about marriage. Instantly, the image of the girl I had started to love and watch on the university path came

to my mind. I had stopped this pursuit ever since Ibrahim talked to me about true and only love. I wondered to myself: Is she still there, unmarried and unengaged? I need to check that because if she is still as she was, then what I wish for might be possible. I prayed silently that God would make her mine."

"We had started spending the early part of our nights in my mother's room, everyone who was free and at home in the evening would come to the mother's room, him and his wife, except for Mariam since she was at her husband's and with her brothers, and they would bring their sons and daughters. Sometimes we all gather, and sometimes only some of us. We sit and talk and watch the news on TV, discuss it, enjoy watermelon seeds, sometimes someone brings some fruits or sweets, one of the women would make us tea or sahlab, we sit and spend our evening together, discussing, sometimes arguing, often differing, and seldom agreeing on the same stance on an issue amidst the intellectual contradictions in the house. After a while, everyone would return to their apartment, usually carrying their children who had fallen asleep in their fathers' arms or in their mothers' laps."

"Large forces from the army, led by Hebron intelligence officers, come to close the houses of the cell previously arrested in Hebron on the background of military operations against the occupation soldiers. They come to the house of Umm Jameel, storm it, and start expelling its inhabitants and throwing some belongings outside. Some soldiers weld the windows and doors shut. An intelligence officer pushes Umm Jameel who tries to cling to her home refusing to leave; he pushes her forcefully, and she falls to the ground. She raises her hand to the sky and says in a voice that only God can hear, 'May these be the last days of your life, and God willing, the youth of the brigades will kill you.'"

Several days later, an intelligence officer drives his new car, speeding through the land, followed by a fast-moving car containing several mujahideen with their rifles ready to unleash hell upon him. As the second car overtakes, gunfire erupts from three machine guns, turning the car and its occupants into a ravaged wreck.

Days later, the mujahideen lie in wait for the car of a rabbi associated with the settlements around Hebron. As the car approaches, they shower it with bullets, causing it to overturn in a valley, killing him and injuring his companion, after which the mujahideen disappear into hiding.

The operations of the mujahideen continue in the Hebron area and its surrounding villages. Whenever they receive information about a target from the

occupying army or settlers, they set up ambushes behind the scattered rocks on the roadside or speed past in a car, transforming the target into a flaming and deadly mess. They have attacked numerous military jeeps, civilian settler vehicles, and buses transporting settlers or soldiers between the settlements in the area and to Jerusalem.

Each day brings shootings and fatalities, and hardly a few days pass without the occupation forces receiving a hit here or there. They strike in the south, prompting a mobilization of forces to the south, where they close off areas, besiege, arrest, and impose curfews. Then a strike comes from the north, prompting a response to the north, and hits continue from the east or the west. Dozens of operations and scores of casualties later, the mujahideen have split into two groups—one in Hebron and the southern villages, and the other in Hebron and the northern villages. The strikes are continuous and successive, with each team completing the work of their brothers in the other team.

Meanwhile, in the Marj al-Zuhur camp in southern Lebanon, Jamal lies on his bed, one leg crossed over the other, trembling with excitement as he listens to the news, laughing a light, confident laugh. He says to his friend Abdel Rahman, "Didn't I tell you? Didn't I say?" Abdel Rahman asks, "What did you say, Sheikh Jamal?" Jamal smiles and says, "Do you remember the story I told you about when we visited you in Surif, when your older brother came, brought us food, and sat talking with us?" Abdel Rahman replies, "I remember the situation generally, but I don't recall the story or what you mentioned then." Jamal, still smiling, says, "The story I told you that day was about when I was a child. In 1967, when the Jews occupied Hebron and began moving around the city easily without any opposition or confrontation, I picked up a stone from the ground and threw it at one of the Jews, then ran behind the apple trees."

After a while, I heard one of the neighbours calling me to come out, saying that the Jew had left the area. When I went out, I found..." Abdel Rahman interrupted, saying, "Ah... I remember." When you went out, you found the Jew brandishing his pistol, threatening you and causing you fear." Jamal replied, "Exactly."

Abdel Rahman asked, "And what reminded you of this?" Jamal answered, "It reminded me of what Hebron is experiencing these days: continuous martyrdom operations that hardly cease despite the martyrs, the siege, the curfew, and the collective punishments."

Hebron today is not the Hebron of twenty-five years ago. That Hebron wanted to live peacefully, earn a living, build wealth, and avoid clashes with the occupation or the settlers, even though they never left any of us alone. But Hebron today is the Hebron of jihad, resistance, and martyrdom..." He sighed, saying, "Do you see, Jamal, how peaceful work, patience, and quiet fire mature things and bring about change?" Abdel Rahman smiled, saying, "You're right, and thank God our efforts have not gone to waste. I see a generation ready to sacrifice and fight. Thank God." Jamal smiled back, saying, "What next, Abdel Rahman? What did you see beyond this? Because this is just the beginning, and by God's will, much greater things will come. I see our entire land ablaze beneath the feet of the occupiers, and I see them cursing the day they set foot on our land and occupied our sanctities."

Chapter Twenty-Five

One evening, as we were chatting in my mother's room, Ibrahim said, "I'm thinking of taking Mariam and the kids for a week to Ramallah, to visit Mohammed and change the scenery!" Mahmoud's and Hassan's wives both thought it was an excellent idea. Mahmoud and Hassan remained silent, while my mother was discreetly observing Ibrahim's face, trying to read what his words did not say. Sensing her concerns, he directed the conversation to her, asking, "What do you think, aunt? How about you come with us? We could visit them for a few days, have a change of air in Ramallah and the West Bank, and then come back." She seemed reassured by his invitation but said, "I have grown old and am no longer able to travel, so you go if you want." Mariam encouraged her, saying, "Go on, mom. There won't be any trouble; the car will take you from our doorstep here to their doorstep there." Turning to Ibrahim, she asked, "We're going with our car, right, Ibrahim?" He replied, "Whenever you wish. Tomorrow if you want, or any time you like in two days, in a week." She responded, "Let me think about it until the morning, and I'll give you an answer tomorrow."

The following day, my mother apologized for not going and wished them well on their journey. Ibrahim then set off to Ramallah with his wife and daughter. Along the way, he pointed out various areas to Mariam and Israa. They stopped where he took Yasser in his arms, telling him and his mother and sister about their country's land from which his grandfather, father, and uncle were displaced—the land of their town, Faluja. After spending some time there, they continued their journey until they reached Ramallah where Mohammed and his wife greeted them warmly. They spent their first evening enjoying each other's company, and then they went to sleep.

In the morning, Ibrahim insisted on taking Mohammed to the university, despite Mohammed's attempts to dissuade him, explaining that it would give him a chance to see and get to know the university.

Mohammed got out of the car to go to his job, and Ibrahim parked the car and locked it. He walked among the students, examining faces until he spotted a young man who he thought could direct him to his destination. After asking him, the student pointed him in a specific direction. Ibrahim headed there, entered one of the cafeterias, and approached a table where some young men, some

bearded, were sitting. He greeted them and asked for directions. One of them stood up to guide him. Ibrahim followed him until he was led to a young man named Salah, who he apparently knew from before. When he saw him, he thanked the other young man and proceeded to Salah, who greeted him warmly. They talked for some time, then parted with the hope that Salah would soon join him at his car. Ibrahim returned to his car and sat waiting.

Shortly after, Salah returned with another young man, Mo'men. They both got into the car, Salah sitting next to Ibrahim and Mo'men in the back. The car moved off slowly, the focus being on the conversation inside rather than heading to a specific destination. After about half an hour of discussion, Ibrahim handed Mo'men a bundle of money, which Mo'men tucked into his pocket. Then Ibrahim turned the car around and headed back to the university, where he dropped off the two young men before returning to Ramallah. He roamed around until it was time to pick up Mohammed from the university and then headed back home.

Mo'men finished his school day and took the car back to his home in Beit Hanina, near Jerusalem. In the evening, he went to the mosque for the Maghrib prayer, where he met one of his friends. They had a very serious private conversation, after which he left and went to another friend's house. He knocked on the door, and his friend came out. They walked together along the quiet street, Mo'men speaking earnestly and his friend listening intently, nodding in agreement.

The next day, Mo'men headed to the university, where he met with Salah and informed him that he was ready, as the cell was now prepared for action, having confirmed his companions' readiness. Salah went to Ramallah to meet Ibrahim and relayed the message. Ibrahim then took Salah in his car to Birzeit, where they met Mo'men and Ibrahim handed him a small box, clasping his hands and wishing him luck and success.

In the evening, Mo'men and his two brothers used one of their company cars, which belonged to an Israeli company and had Hebrew writing on it, for a reconnaissance tour around Jerusalem. On the first day, they drove north, and on the second day, south, examining the security precautions of the occupation forces and the police, the level of traffic and pedestrian movement, and the presence of lone soldiers at the roadside and bus stations. Whenever one of them noticed something noteworthy, they would alert the others.

Days later, the three set out from Beit Hanina heading south. Once they moved away from the Arab area, each of them pulled out a small cap, similar to those worn by Jews and the religious, and put them on their heads. They drove looking for a suitable target along the road where a soldier, in his military uniform and carrying a rifle, signaled for cars to pick him up on their way. Mo'men rested his head against the seatback, pretending to be asleep from exhaustion.

The car stopped and the soldier approached, peering through the front window and asking the driver in Hebrew if he was heading to the Tzuba (military base). Hassan, responding in Hebrew, told him to get in. The soldier opened the back door and climbed into the vehicle. A few minutes after they set off, with Hebrew songs playing on the radio, Mo'men brandished his pistol at the soldier, placing his hand over the soldier's weapon to prevent him from using it. Abd al-Karim turned towards the soldier, brandishing a knife, and both demanded that he not move to ensure his safety. However, the soldier attempted to escape and reached for his rifle. Mo'men fired several shots at him, and Abd al-Karim stabbed him multiple times. They took his automatic rifle (M16) and placed a large paper on his waist proclaiming the brigades' responsibility for his kidnapping and killing, then dumped his body on the side of the road where it rolled down into a ravine.

Abd al-Rahim met Mohammad Abu Rashid, the leader of the brigades in the southern West Bank (Hebron, Bethlehem, and surrounding villages). Feeling overwhelmed by the world closing in on him, Abd al-Rahim returned to his town of Surif, counting down the hours and minutes of the week, eager for a meaningful commitment to the mujahideen ranks.

The following day, clashes broke out in the town with the occupying forces that had come to arrest one of the young men. The townspeople resisted with stones, injuring many soldiers. As darkness fell and the curtains of night descended on the town, a large force from the army and intelligence began a widespread arrest campaign among the town's youth. A significant army force raided my aunt's house and arrested Abd al-Rahim after a thorough search of the house found nothing incriminating except some papers and leaflets that could easily be explained away as found on the street, like many others.

My aunt Fathiya was distraught over the arrest of the apple of her eye, her pride and joy, but what comforted her somewhat was knowing that Abd al-Rahim had become a man and she need not worry about him. When they arrested him, he was composed and resolute, a man in every sense of the word. The words he spoke to her as he stood at the threshold, being taken away—"Mother, do not fear

for me; I have become a man"—echoed in her ears, comforting her as she prayed to God for his protection, safety, and swift return.

Abd al-Rahim was taken to the Negev detention centre, where he was sentenced to six months of administrative detention. During this time, he met many young people, sheikhs, and preachers, greatly benefiting from the educational and cultural magazines available there, as well as from extensive reading.

Meanwhile, Abu Rashdi and his brothers intensified their attacks on the occupation forces and settlers in the area. Hardly a day passed without them striking a patrol or settlers, sometimes using the tactic of the passing car, other times ambushing their targets from the sides of the road or from behind rocks scattered along mountain slopes and valley bottoms. The occupiers found themselves under relentless fire from the mujahideen, resulting in casualties—dead here, wounded there.

After an intense period of activity by the enemy's intelligence and military forces in the region, the names of Abu Rashdi and some of his key brothers became known to the occupation forces. Despite several raids led by intelligence officers on his family's home attempting to arrest him, they were unsuccessful. Abu Rashdi had already bid farewell to his family, telling them he would rarely return home and that his absence might be prolonged. He began moving through nearby mountains and villages, staying hidden, often spending the night with friends or kind people who were quick to shelter resistance fighters, offering aid and earning merit for their support.

One evening, as we sat in my mother's room sipping tea, munching on watermelon seeds, and discussing various topics, it was time for the news. Mohammed turned on the television to the news bulletin, which reported that secret negotiations had been ongoing for some time between representatives of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel in a European capital, with both sides nearing an agreement.

Faiza called out to Hassan, who began to mock the negotiators, expressing dismay at such developments. He firmly believed that negotiating with the Israelis was inadmissible under any circumstances, arguing that to negotiate meant to recognize Israel and its right to exist on Palestinian land, and that no Palestinian should ever do such a thing.

Mahmoud expressed his dismay at Hassan's stance and was surprised at the insertion of religion into such matters, as this was a political issue unrelated to

religion. Politicians understand the situation and take necessary actions. He questioned Hassan and the Islamic faction's goals for this uprising and its associated events, martyrs, and sacrifices. Is this effort merely futile, aimless, and solely for the sake of dying? Or is it for a specific purpose? Mahmoud concluded that the uprising must have clear, specific, and sensible political objectives, and that an unsophisticated rifle is a suicidal and futile effort. Ibrahim then asked, "What do you consider clear and reasonable objectives?" Mahmoud responded that it involves implementing international legal resolutions which call for the establishment of a Palestinian state on the territories occupied in 1969. Hassan shouted, "Does that mean we acknowledge Israel's right to over 75% of historic Palestinian lands in exchange for their withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the establishment of a Palestinian state there?" Mahmoud answered yes, asking if he wanted more than that. Hassan yelled, "Yes, I want more because Israel is a usurping state that was established on our land, and it must be eradicated." Mahmoud smiled and said, "Who said that Israel must not be eradicated? Brother, we are not discussing mere slogans right now; we are talking about the reality and the political phase we are going through... The reality is that the world is not serious about resolving our issue justly to achieve our goals, and the Arabs are unable to do anything decisive. As Palestinians, we do not have the ability to..." Hassan interrupted him angrily and agitatedly, "Who says we don't have the ability? Don't you see that we've killed hundreds of them in two years?" Mahmoud laughed, "And what does killing hundreds mean? They have killed many more of us." Hassan screamed, "The important thing is that they are now ready to change their stance. Haven't you heard the recent statements by their politicians about their willingness to leave Gaza?" Mahmoud replied, "I have heard, and that is what will happen. They will leave Gaza and the West Bank, and we will establish a Palestinian state there." Ibrahim intervened, saying, "The problem, Mahmoud, is not about establishing a Palestinian state, as there isn't a single Palestinian who doesn't want that. The problem is the price we, as the Palestinian people, will pay in exchange for the establishment of the Palestinian state." Mahmoud smirked sarcastically, "So, philosopher of the phase, do you think a state can be established without recognizing Israel?" Ibrahim smiled, "Yes." Mahmoud screamed, "How? And who..." Ibrahim cut him off, "It's clear that continuing resistance and military activities, which cause human losses to the occupation, along with a popular uprising that inflicts political and media damage, will force them to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Then we can establish a state on any piece of land from which the enemy withdraws."

Mahmoud smiled again sarcastically, "And what's the difference, philosopher?" Mariam shouted, "Why do you talk to him like that?" Before Mahmoud could respond, Ibrahim gestured to her to calm down, saying, "Don't be upset with Mahmoud, Mariam, and let him behave as he likes. He is like a father to us all."

Mahmoud, looking away in embarrassment, said, "What's the difference, Ibrahim?" Ibrahim replied, "The difference between Israel leaving the West Bank and Gaza, either through an agreement or not... If they leave by an agreement, it means that we Palestinians must adhere to certain obligations, the least of which is recognizing their right to our remaining land. However, if they leave without an agreement under the pressure of resistance, it means that we have committed to nothing and the door remains open for us to continue immediately or later... when we find it appropriate."

Here, Mahmoud interrupted, saying, "This is how you think things work. This is political shortsightedness. You understand nothing about politics or the reality that surrounds us, our cause, the full Arab reality, and you know nothing about our personal or objective circumstances."

Hassan, becoming agitated, retorted, "That's typical of you, Mahmoud, always attacking and generalizing, starting to use big terms out of context—our personal, objective, dramatic, and melon-like circumstances." Mahmoud laughed, saying, "This is what I always say—you are politically ignorant, and you oversimplify things." Hassan yelled, "Don't call us ignorant and don't attack, discuss respectfully without aggression." Then my mother intervened, saying, "Enough for tonight. Go to your rooms, I want to sleep, and you've given us a headache with your political discussions."

Yahya hides at a friend's place in the town of Qarawat Bani Hassan, north of the West Bank. During his hideout, he prepares some explosive devices which some of his aides transport to groups he has organized and agreed upon for action. These groups lay the devices on roads used by patrols or settlers, achieving some limited success but undoubtedly introducing a new element into the battle tools. Meanwhile, the occupation forces periodically raid his family's home searching for Yahya, to no avail. They turn over everything in the house, damaging and destroying, and interrogate the parents who have nothing to say about their son.

In ordinary times, away from the corner of the street overlooking the house, a youth stands suspiciously, observing the house most of the time while pretending to be distracted... Yahya might sneak in from the back, entering the house

through a window, kissing his parents' hands and heads, his infant child, greeting his wife, taking a shower, changing his clothes, and then heading back to his hideout and his activities.

In Gaza, Ibrahim meets with Imad and two other mujahideen at Abu Nidal's house. They sit alone in the room, where Nidal serves them tea and leaves the room so they can discuss their private matters.

Ibrahim shares information about a regular patrol of occupation forces consisting of two Jeep vehicles that move between 6 and 7 AM daily on Victory Street near Beach Camp. He places a paper on the mat in front of them, showing a rough map of the street and its branches, and points with a pen: "This branch is blocked with concrete barrels placed by the occupation forces, this branch allows for vehicle withdrawal, and this is a dirt branch not suitable for vehicles. The patrols usually come from the north and head south, but sometimes they move in the opposite direction." Amar takes the pen from Ibrahim's hand and says, "There needs to be someone to signal the arrival and direction of the patrol. We'll divide into two groups: the first group will be here," pointing with the pen to a western branch off the street, "and the second group here," pointing to another branch south of the first. "The signal person will move on the main road between the branches, watching for the patrol's approach and direction to immediately inform both groups, especially the second one, which is farther from the patrol's point of entry, and join them right away. The first group, which the patrol passes directly by, will let the first vehicle pass and after the second one crosses, they will open fire. By then, the first vehicle will have reached the first group, who will attack it, thus trapping both vehicles in the ambush, preventing one from aiding the other, as each will be engulfed in the fire we open."

"Today we will go out to scout the location and observe the escape routes, and tomorrow morning, God willing, we will proceed," they reply, "God willing." Ibrahim continues, "Imad, tomorrow I must join you; I no longer have the patience for only intelligence work, I need to participate in some of the operations." One of the others starts to object, but Imad interrupts, "It's okay, Ibrahim, no problem. Come to us at five-thirty AM tomorrow."

In the morning at the designated time, two mujahideen were stationed at the first branch and two at the second, with a young man walking on the main road, pretending to wait for a car to take him to work. At the end of each branch, a car sat with its driver at the wheel and the engine running, ready to move. The signal youth announced that the patrol was coming from the north and joined the group

further back, making five ready machine guns. As the first Jeep passed by the first branch, and when the second reached it, the two mujahideen ran to the top of the branch and opened fire, trailing behind the vehicle.

Simultaneously, the three from the other branch moved to the main street where they encountered the first patrol and opened fire with their three rifles. Each of the five changed their rifle magazines, and the second magazines were fired with limited shots coming from the patrols, which were unfocused. The two vehicles collided with the wall, and as the occupation soldiers bled, the mujahideen retreated to their cars, which swaggered away from the scene.

Large reinforcements and forces arrived at the location where soldiers, officers, intelligence agents, and medics stood in the street to assess the situation. Under a small bush in a nearby orchard, one of the youths extended his hand, throwing two hand grenades that also caused several injuries.

The Israeli political, military, and security leaders were furious, and one of them, pounding on the table before someone of lower rank, demanded Imad's head as soon as possible, insisting there was no time to wait, that efforts must be intensified, working hours and teams doubled, and the largest number of agents must be employed to decisively deal with Imad Akil.

Ibrahim went to his construction job in one of the houses with the workers he was with, acting normally as if he had not just participated in that battle. He finished his work in the afternoon, returned home, showered, changed clothes, ate, and played with his son and daughter. He left the house to pray the Maghrib at the mosque, then drove away in his car and returned home some time after Isha. He joined the national conference room at my mother's house, where the discussion revolved around the morning's martyrdom operation, rumored to have been led by Imad and the audacity and bravery of the perpetrators. Ibrahim did not intervene, as if the matter did not concern him at all. When Mahmoud turned on the TV to the news broadcast, the operation was a significant topic, with statements from some Israeli leaders, some threatening and vowing revenge, while others called for withdrawing from Gaza and leaving behind its troubles.

Then came the next piece of news, which confirmed that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations had indeed been happening. Informed sources, who wished to remain anonymous, stated that an agreement between the two parties was nearly ready for signing. The negotiations had taken place in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, under a veil of secrecy, and an interim agreement was expected to be

signed soon. Ibrahim said, "Don't you think you are being too hasty and overly optimistic? Let's see the agreement first so we can evaluate it and then express our opinion."

Mahmoud responded, "Your stance has been known from the start; you reject everything for reasons of right or wrong. This has been your position since your inception. You object to everything and reject everything. I expect you to reject any agreement and any deal because you only know how to oppose."

When the news spoke of the soon-to-be-signed Oslo Agreement, known as "Gaza Jericho First," the Palestinian street was divided between supporters and opponents. At the forefront of the supporting demonstration was my brother Mahmoud and his friends, and leading the opposition was my brother Hassan and his friends. Both demonstrations were large; the supporters chanted, "Gaza Jericho the beginning... and Jerusalem the end," while the opponents chanted, "Gaza Jericho a scandal that stinks."

The two demonstrations went in opposite directions. As the first passed by the occupation army's patrols, which stood watching what was happening in the camp, the demonstrators threw olive branches at the Jeeps, while the soldiers pointed their guns at the demonstrators, fearing that an opponent might have infiltrated the rally and could throw a bomb or fire at them. When the second demonstration passed, the demonstrators threw stones at the patrols, and their chants intensified, singing, "With soul, with blood, we will redeem you, Palestine... Jerusalem is ours, no to oppressors... Woe to them in the epic battle."

The soldiers responded by firing tear gas canisters and rubber and plastic bullets. As the two demonstrations met, Mahmoud was carried on shoulders in one, and Hassan in the other, each chanting their slogans, one supporting and the other opposing. For a moment, their eyes met, the chanting intensified, the voices grew louder, and there were some minor clashes and confrontations between demonstrators from both sides. Images of the leaders signing the Oslo Accords were broadcast on television screens.

On the roof of Masab bin Umair Mosque in the Zaytoun neighbourhood of Gaza, a young man not yet twenty years old lay in wait, watching the road. Nearby, in an abandoned house close to the mosque, Imad and Ibrahim were also lying in wait, anticipating the whistle from the young man. In Imad's hand was a short M16 rifle, and Ibrahim held a Kalashnikov. Each had extra ammunition magazines by their side. From a distance, a Jeep carrying three

soldiers appeared as part of an occupation army patrol. The young man blew his first whistle, signaling Imad and Ibrahim to prepare. Then he blew a second whistle as the Jeep approached the abandoned house. They let it advance a few more meters before they burst out, unleashing automatic gunfire.

The three soldiers dove to the ground, and the vehicle continued forward until it crashed into a door of a warehouse opposite them. Imad and Ibrahim, changing their magazines for the second time, continued firing as they approached the vehicle. When the Jeep stopped, Imad reached it first, pulling a soldier out onto the ground, placing his foot on his neck, and firing a final shot to his head while Ibrahim filmed the scene. They took three new rifles from the soldiers, and their getaway car had arrived. They boarded the car and sped away.

At the same time, on the main road between Hebron and Bethlehem, four mujahideen, led by Abu Rashdi, lay behind rocks on the roadside, each armed with an automatic assault rifle, waiting for any Israeli vehicle to pass by. When a bus carrying a large number of soldiers reached them, they opened fire, turning it into a hellfire. The bus surged forward for tens of meters before gradually coming to a stop on the side of the road. Meanwhile, their getaway car arrived; the mujahideen boarded and drove away on a dirt road between the mountains. The car traveled a long distance from the site of the operation, and at a bend in the winding road, just a few dozen meters away, there was an army checkpoint with four soldiers standing beside the road, pointing their weapons and signaling the car to stop. Khalid, the driver, asked, "What should I do?" Abu Rashdi, with a stern voice, instructed, "Pretend you're going to stop, and when you reach them, speed up, and each of us will fire at the soldiers on his side. Raise your rifles and begin at the same moment when we are five meters from them... Ready?" They responded: "Ready, by God’s will."

As the car slowed down, it bore the Palestinian flag and an olive branch, as a decoy. Khalid smiled at the soldiers, and they smiled back, then Abu Rashdi yelled, "Now!" Four rifles rose and unleashed a barrage of gunfire on the soldiers who fell to the ground, unable to return even a single shot. Khalid accelerated the car rapidly, with one of the rifles firing bullets just over his head. After advancing several hundred meters, Abu Rashdi yelled to turn back to confirm the soldiers' deaths and to collect their weapons, noting there were four rifles. Khalid quickly turned the steering wheel, and at high speed, the car spun out of control, flipped onto its side, and rolled down into a ravine. The vehicle crushed Abu Rashdi's leg, and the others sustained bruises and wounds to their heads and bodies.

The sound of approaching reinforcements from the occupation forces grew louder, along with the noise of a helicopter echoing in the sky. The mujahideen awakened from the crash and struggled to free themselves from the car. They managed to extract their leader and brother with great difficulty, supporting him as they tried to move forward. The sound of the crowd and helicopter increased, indicating that a major sweep operation was imminent in the area. Abu Rashdi stopped, handed over all the ammunition to his comrades, and told them to head in the opposite direction towards the slope of the nearby mountain. He continued, "I will hide behind the rocks of this mountain and engage them as long as God enables me. You go in the opposite direction. Now!" But they refused to leave him, responding in unison, "How can we leave you, Abu Rashdi? It will not happen. Either we all escape together or we all perish together." Abu Rashdi laughed and said, "You have much work ahead of you, go on, take the ammunition and go, this is an order!" Reluctantly, they handed him the ammunition, said their tearful goodbyes, and left.

Khalid shouted for each to go in a different direction, so if one was caught, the others might escape. Large forces of occupation soldiers arrived and surrounded the area. Abu Rashdi fired at them from behind the rocks, moving from one rock to another to alter the direction of his shots, making the soldiers believe they were facing multiple shooters. This distracted the occupation forces for over an hour and a half as he skirmished with them until a helicopter pinpointed his location and eliminated him with several missiles. His pure soul ascended to his Creator, to the heavens as wide as the heavens and the earth.

Khalid reached the edge of a nearby village and met one of its residents who hid him in his home, quickly treating his wounds and providing him with food and drink, all with warmth and affection. Abdul Rahman reached a settlement in the area where construction materials were left out. He lay down on the ground and covered himself with a cement mixing tub, propped slightly with a stone to allow for breathing and watching what was happening. Meanwhile, Muhammad climbed an ancient olive tree and stretched out on one of its thick branches, continuing the engagement of the occupation forces with Abu Rashdi.

After the bombing of the position where Abu Rashdi had fortified himself, a sweeping operation was conducted on the mountain, but they found no one but him. They began a more thorough sweep in other directions. The soldiers stood under the tree where Muhammad was stretched out on a branch, oblivious to his presence, blinded by divine intervention. They did not approach the settler roads,

as no one would assume that a mujahid could escape to such a place and hide there.

Tension permeated our home in the following days. Mahmoud and Hassan avoided each other and did not come to sit and chat in my mother's room for several days. When they did meet, each turned his face away from the other. If one had to greet the other, it was with muttered, indistinct words, met with equally vague replies.

Ibrahim and I continued to sit with our mother, following the news and events. I expressed my shock and agitation about the martyrdom operations mentioned in the news. Ibrahim, however, maintained a stony facade, not uttering a word of commentary on it but criticized those who signed the Oslo Accords without resorting to insults.

One of Mahmoud's friends, who had come from abroad to join the Palestinian Authority forces entering the Gaza Strip, visited us carrying two pieces of news: the first - that we had two half-brothers from our father, Majid and Khalid, who would be arriving with the forces from abroad. Mahmoud screamed when he heard this, another voice urging to listen that he had brothers he didn't know about, Majid and Khalid, who were coming with the forces, meaning they were grown-ups, yes, they were in their early twenties. Mahmoud screamed again, "And my father? What news of my father?" The guest replied with the bad news that our father had died in Jordan following the birth of your brothers, from the clashes that occurred there. Upon hearing this, my mother collapsed to the floor unconscious, and we began trying to revive her by waving a cologne bottle under her nose, feeling as if we had been struck on the back of our heads with a hammer.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The recent news about my father's death in Jordan and the young brothers we had never heard of before occupied much of our time and discussions at home. It became clear that my father, when the West Bank and Gaza Strip were occupied in 1967, had left for Egypt alive and then settled in Jordan, where he married a Palestinian woman in Baqa'a camp and had twin sons, Majid and Khaled. Days after their birth, my father was martyred in the clashes that occurred there. Khaled and Majid grew up with their mother in Jordan, who had passed away years earlier, and they would be coming with the Palestinian forces that would be allowed to enter Gaza and Jericho as part of the agreement.

We had not heard anything about our father since the occupation and had believed he had been martyred until we suddenly discovered that we have two young brothers who would be coming to Gaza, meaning they would somehow join the family. My mother was in a state resembling hysteria for several days, appearing to be suffering from a psychological and nervous shock that was difficult to overcome. All our efforts were focused on comforting her and trying to alleviate her suffering. Despite my father's absence for nearly three decades, she had always hoped to see him walk into our home alive one day. To receive news of his remarriage and no contact with us for about four years from his departure until his death, and that he had children from another wife, and then to receive news of his death in such a manner, was too much for her to bear.

We tried to convince her that the first years after the war were difficult and he surely wasn't able to contact us. May God have mercy on him; he has faced his judgment with God. And we, thank God, as you see, have become men, and we fill her ears and eyes, lacking nothing. We bring her stories and tragedies of others, compare our situation to others, and reassure her that we are in much better circumstances. Gradually, her condition began to improve slightly, but it was clear that she had been dealt a severe blow, as she no longer had the energy, vitality, and strength she once had.

One of the topics that occupied our attention at home and the interest of the Palestinian street these days was that the three soldiers killed in the recent operation in Zaytoun neighbourhood in Gaza were Druze. A large number of

Druze youth had joined the border guards, police, or the Israeli Prison Service, performing their duties as well as the Jews did.

Druze soldiers often engaged in violent and reprehensible actions against protesters or mujahideen, and some even overstepped the bounds of decency and morals, harassing women and girls, attempting to assault their honor. This created an atmosphere of resentment and feelings of anger towards them. However, this never led the resistance mujahideen to specifically target these Druze soldiers; the feeling that they are part of our Arab Palestinian people remained, despite all their actions. The Zaytoun operation was carried out without knowing they were Druze; the clear and specific target was to target the occupation soldiers in an official military jeep, wearing the uniform of the occupation forces, carrying their weapons, speaking their language, and performing their duties thoroughly and perfectly without deficiency or bias.

When the fact that they were Druze was mentioned, I could see the meanings of regret and pain in Ibrahim's eyes, and no doubt he was thinking to himself: "Ah, if only they had been Jews!" When we saw images of their wives, mothers, and sisters crying over their deaths on television, Ibrahim couldn't suppress a burning sigh that emerged from his chest as a painful groan. At the same time, voices from many patriotic Druze intellectuals were calling for the necessity of convincing Druze youth to stay away from service in the occupation army and from acting against their kin in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and some groups advocating for this began to emerge.

The dialogue in this case brought up another aspect of it, which is the issue of many Bedouin and Circassian youth serving in the Israeli army, where the Bedouins work as trackers in the Israeli army and provide significant services, undertaking dangerous tasks against the resistance in Palestine and in southern Lebanon. Undoubtedly, the issue of the Bedouins is more sensitive than that of the Druze, and it creates significant crises for the resistance fighters when they find that their operations have harvested some of them instead of reaping the lives of the occupying Jewish soldiers. Often, dialogues carrying contradictory viewpoints would unfold among us as we discussed these issues following news that brought something of that nature, but ultimately everyone would concede to the truth that anyone wearing the uniform of the Israeli army, carrying its weapon, and performing its tasks, is a legitimate target for resistance operations.

What compounded the dilemma was the significant contradiction within the Bedouin community in the occupied territories of 1948, as mosque imams

refused to pray for these fallen, to march in their funerals, or pray for them, and many families refused to drape their children's coffins with the Israeli flag or to have official military funerals for them. Amid all this, Ibrahim would repeat his usual phrase: "Look how far the Jews have succeeded in recruiting part of our people to guard their security."

Once again, the minds of Israeli leaders were blown by Emad's boldness and strength and the severe embarrassment he caused them, making them appear as if they were fleeing Gaza from the resistance and not leaving according to a political agreement with an official party. The commander of the Southern District gathered his army and intelligence officers and banged on the table saying, "I want Emad's head; all efforts must be concentrated on that," prompting everyone to undertake their role in that.

Thousands of pictures of Emad, with and without a beard, with and without a kufiya, with long hair and short, with glasses and without, were distributed to soldiers who set up hundreds of checkpoints throughout the sector, searching, digging, and raiding homes, led by intelligence officers.

Intelligence officers, on the other hand, contacted their agents, some they summoned to their offices, and others they met in the manner of meeting them on the sides of remote roads. They showed them various pictures of Emad and asked them to monitor activists believed to be associated with him, frequented by him, and to report immediately on every movement or piece of information.

Many activists came under near-permanent surveillance, and we noticed that two were alternating in monitoring the front of our house, and many rounds and houses believed or assumed to be frequented by Emad were placed under surveillance.

One of the agents was monitoring "Abu Nidal's" house in Shuja'iyya, as it seems they were suspicious of the house, or perhaps a word slipped from one of the small children in the house to a friend, bragging about Emad's visit to their home. One evening, Emad quietly slipped into Abu Nidal's house, where the family welcomed him with love and loyalty, as was their custom. Um Nidal hurried to prepare food for him, as he was fasting that day. The sound of the Maghrib call to prayer rose, and Emad lifted the clay jug to his mouth to sip some water as he said: "O Allah, for You I have fasted and on Your provision I break my fast." Suddenly, he was startled by the sound of Nidal who entered running down the alley, "A large force from the army is surrounding the area." Emad put down the

jug without tasting the water and said, "No one can avert God's decree. It may be a routine matter, but let's wait and see without panicking," and went up to observe the place from a high vantage point.

The special forces of the occupation army began to specifically surround the house, with hundreds of rifle barrels aimed at them, and behind them hundreds and hundreds more soldiers. A voice from a loudspeaker called out to Emad to surrender himself as his cover was blown, and there was no need to resist. Emad smiled, reciting poetry:

- "What day from death shall I flee?
- A day not destined, I do not fear,
- A day not destined, or a day decreed?
- From what is destined, the cautious does not escape."

He drew his pistol from his side and readied it to fire, remaining hidden on the roof observing their advance when he spotted one of the soldiers approaching the house in a way that put him within firing range. He aimed his pistol at him and fired a bullet that hit him between the eyes. Then, hundreds of machine guns opened fire on the location from which the shot was fired. Then a complete silence ensued, everyone thought that Emad had passed to the hereafter.

They advanced again, Emad jumped off the roof, firing his gun and shouting "Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar," and once again, they opened fire on him, his pure body was soaked with sacred blood and the gates of heaven opened to welcome one of the most prominent symbols of the Palestinian resistance in the 1990s. The soldiers watched him from a distance, not daring to advance a single step, and the voice from the loudspeaker called Abu Nidal to come out of the house. He came out, they ordered him to raise his hands high; he did not comply. They ordered him to move towards Emad, lying on the ground, to check him. He approached, bent over him with tears streaming from his eyes and rifles aimed at him and the spotlights making the place as bright as day. Abu Nidal turned over Emad's pure body, which the bullets had torn apart, and found his sacred, pure blood pouring out, watering the earth under the olive tree whose branches hung over him tenderly and lovingly, trying to protect him from the night's chill, darkness, air, and the harshness of the sinful, criminal enemy.

The news spread through the nation like wildfire, people poured into alleys, streets, and squares, demonstrating and chanting, "With our souls, with our blood, we sacrifice for you, Palestine; with our souls, with our blood, we sacrifice

for you, martyr; with our souls, with our blood, we sacrifice for you, Emad." All the nation's squares opened in a fierce confrontation with the occupation forces. Farewell to the soul of the heroic mujahid, Emad Hussein Aql.

The news reached our home late that evening, as it did all homes, and everyone's eyes were teary, except for Ibrahim, whose eyes froze, his face changed, and he stood up abruptly. My sister Mariam was standing at the door, tears welling in her eyes, holding Yasir with Israa standing beside her. Suddenly, Ibrahim shouted at her, "Bring the weapon, Mariam!" His words were like a thunderbolt; this was the first time Ibrahim had so openly revealed his true intentions. Mariam handed her son Yasir to me, hurried up the stairs, and quickly returned with a Kalashnikov and several magazines filled with bullets, handing them to Ibrahim as she wiped her tears with the corner of her scarf, smiling.

Ibrahim took the rifle, kissed Israa's forehead, then kissed Yasir's head, wiped another tear from Mariam's cheek, and left the house while our hearts prayed for his protection and guidance. I then remembered my mother, shaking Israa's cradle, chanting, "Bring me my scarf, you who stand at the door... Bring me my weapon." I recalled her singing the same words as I crawled next to her while she rocked Mariam's cradle. I realized how deeply those words, which we absorbed with our mothers' milk, were ingrained in our souls, blending into our blood. Remembering this as I saw Mariam, the delicate blossom we feared might be shattered by the gentlest winds, wipe away her tears as she parted with the man of her dreams, the father of her children. She handed him the weapon, her hands steady, her eyes clear of any hesitation, fear, or calculation. It confirmed to me then that we are a strong and mighty people who cannot be broken or pushed back, that a mysterious force flows through our being, instilling in us a strange readiness to sacrifice everything dear to us. My mother's voice echoed in my ears, "Bring me my weapon, you who stand at the door... Bring me my weapon, never shall I rest, my heart's delight... Never shall I rest, until I carry my weapon, kill my murderer, and achieve success with my blood and fire... Bring me my weapon, bring me my weapon, you who stand at the door... Bring me my weapon."

The vehicles of the top officers and intelligence and administrative personnel of the occupation forces in the Gaza Strip had changed their route of entry and exit. Instead of taking the central road from the city eastward, which passes through the densely populated and busy heart of the city and its east, they started moving westward along Victory Road to the Sudanese junction, then west to the coastal road. Ibrahim had received information about the movement of one of the

occupation forces' leaders on this route at a specific hour early in the night on a regular basis. He decided to target him as a swift and initial retaliation for the martyrdom of Emad.

At the end of Al-Nasr Street, where a road forks east towards Jabalia and west to Al-Sudaniya point on the seashore, the occupying forces placed several concrete blocks that force passing cars to stop, giving priority to the occupation patrols. They also demolished the walls and fences of the orchards surrounding the junction, and a curfew was in effect from early evening. The occupation forces' vehicles either came from the south, slowing down as they reached the junction then turning west, or came from the west, slowing down at the junction to head south towards the centre of the city. Hidden behind trees and orange groves, sixteen eyes gleamed from behind each tree trunk, two eyes per mujahid. They lay prone on the ground with their fingers on the triggers of their Kalashnikovs and M16s, waiting for the target to approach.

A military jeep from the patrol coming from the west slowed down and turned south, casting floodlights on the trees hiding the mujahideen, turning night into day and causing their hearts to race. This was not the target, and if the soldiers had noticed the glint of the mujahideen's eyes or the glint from a gun barrel, they would have opened fire on the trees, potentially compromising the mission. However, the patrol vehicle turned and sped away from the area. Minutes later, the sounds of vehicles tearing up the earth were heard, and the screech of brakes announced the arrival of two jeeps near the junction.

A modern military jeep used by senior military commanders and another ordinary one for escort slowed down, and the voice of Ibrahim rang out: "Allahu Akbar, in the name of God... Allahu Akbar." The eight rifles opened fire simultaneously like hellfire on the vehicles. The mujahideen then stood up, advancing towards the jeeps to unload their magazines again. The first jeep crashed into the concrete blocks and stopped; then the second jeep collided with the first and also stopped. The only response from them was one soldier in the second jeep opening the rear door and peeking out with his rifle, unable to fire a single shot. The mujahideen split into two groups: the first headed north on a rural road where a vehicle was waiting to take them towards Jabalia town. At an intersection further down, a jeep from a patrol stopped, setting up a barrier and signaling the approaching vehicle to stop.

Ibrahim screamed at the driver to pretend to stop, and when you reach them, accelerate as fast as you can, and you all open fire on the patrol. As soon as the

car approached the patrol, the barrels of the guns protruded from the shattered car windows under the barrage of bullets that rained down on the soldiers of the patrol who let out screams of panic and terror, falling dead and wounded, and the car sped off at full speed. One of the soldiers, hidden behind the jeep as the car passed him, opened fire on it, shattering the rear glass of the car, causing everyone to duck down. One of the bullets grazed Ibrahim's head and singed his hair. The driver turned into a side street only to find it blocked by concrete barrels. Confused, the driver wanted to back up, but Ibrahim screamed to stop and they got out to climb over the barrier and continue on foot. They climbed over the barrels and jumped to the other side at the door of a fancy house, a modern car stopped, an old man and his wife got out. The mujahideen approached them asking for the car keys promising to return them. The man trembled in front of four armed men, the driver snatched the keys from his hand and took off in it, the car sped away with them, and the old man's legs could no longer support him, and he collapsed to the ground.

One of the mujahideen said after a while this is a heavy Samsonite suitcase, putting it on his lap, and when he opened it, it was filled with bundles of dollars, hundreds of bundles, an amount estimated at a million dollars. Ibrahim laughed saying: "We can't go back now, surely the occupation forces will reach the place, and the man has to wait until daylight." At the first rays of dawn, one of the young men went back to the man's house, rang the doorbell, and the man came out. The young man greeted him with peace and handed him the car key saying: "The mujahideen thank you very much and apologize for the inconvenience, they were compelled to do so, the suitcase is as it is in the car, go out and retrieve it and count what's inside." The man could hardly believe what was happening and muttered thank God in heaven "Who are you? God protect you and guide you, God indeed, you deserve His support. Wait, my son, wait," and the young man left without looking back.

In the early hours of the day, the statement was issued about the operation that avenged the soul of the martyred hero, and the radio announced the death of a number of occupation soldiers, including the commander of the special forces in the Gaza Strip army, Colonel Meir Vitz, and crowds erupted cheering: "Salute to the brigades... Al-Qassam Brigades."

Three militants from the "Islamic Jihad Movement" planted an explosive device on a road used by the occupation forces and their settlers in the West Bank near Anza village and vanished into the darkness, waiting for their target. A GMC

vehicle passed by; Essam pressed the electric wire against the battery pole, detonating the device loudly, igniting the fuel tank, killing three occupants. The militants withdrew, and days later, investigations led to the identification of the perpetrators; two were captured, and Essam, who continued his operations and activities, escaped.

Later, occupation forces received information about his hideout and quickly mobilized large forces to surround the area. They called for his surrender, but there was no response. They began storming the place, and Essam opened fire on the invading force, killing and wounding several. They withdrew, dragging their dead and wounded, then started bombing the location until they destroyed it and advanced again to storm it. Essam fired at them anew, forcing another withdrawal and a complete destruction of the house ensued, and Essam's pure soul ascended to paradise.

Three mujahideen boarded a bus in Jerusalem, crowded with Israeli passengers, brandishing their weapons and explosives, and announced a hijacking. The goal was to negotiate the release of Palestinian prisoners from occupation jails. A stray bullet struck one of the mujahideen, causing him to fall to the bus floor amidst chaos and confusion. The bus then crashed into a power pole. The remaining two mujahideen opened fire, killing some and wounding others, then exited the bus, commandeered a passing vehicle with the driver, and sped south. Near the Jerusalem exit towards Beit Jala and Bethlehem, occupying soldiers bombarded the car with missiles, killing everyone inside.

Ibrahim devised a way to travel to Ramallah, where he met with fellow mujahideen. Immediately, he and two others drove to the Ofer military camp near Ramallah. They spotted a settlers' vehicle, sped past it while firing, killing the occupants, and withdrew to hide as occupation forces hurried to surround and search the area without success.

Days later, they traveled on the Jerusalem-Ramallah road searching for a new target. They encountered a settlers' vehicle that had stopped due to a flat tire. The three passengers were outside changing the tire when the mujahideen drove by, shooting them dead, then quickly fled the area which was under a curfew. This incited madness in the occupation's intelligence services, leading to a widespread arrest campaign among activists in the area, hoping to find a lead to the perpetrators.

One of the detainees was Abdul Mun'im, a young man in his early twenties, active and effective in the Intifada. He had recently met Ibrahim and his fellow mujahideen, who trained him in weaponry, hoping he would commence jihadist activities in the coming days. Some of his young associates, trapped by the spies' traps during the interrogation, confessed about themselves and him, potentially facing a minimum of ten years in prison if tried. The interrogation intensified on Abdul Mun'im regarding his associates' confessions, which he denied. They took him for deception tactics, but he was not fooled. They grouped him with his associates and placed eavesdropping and recording devices, but to no avail, as he remained cautious. Whenever one of his associates mentioned anything, he would loudly rebuke and deny knowing him.

The interrogation intensified without yield. One of the interrogators entered and began bargaining for his freedom, stating that he knew Abdul Mun'im refused to confess because he didn't want to stay in prison, but his associates had incriminated him, and he would face fifteen years in prison, whether he confessed or not. He offered a deal: if Abdul Mun'im cooperated, they would release him. He left him to think and decide. Alone in his cell, Abdul Mun'im thought deeply. "God is greatest, it's time to bear arms and start armed jihad, to fulfill the duty and soothe the aggrieved soul. Before I could act, this imprisonment came at the worst possible time. O God, what's happening to me? Should I agree to deal with them to escape prison? And of course, would I hasten to carve the path I've chosen?" He pondered over and over and made his decision.

When the interrogator returned to ask his opinion, Abdul Mun'im agreed. The interrogator, who began to show friendliness, informed him that he would complete his offer after a few days in front of the military court, which would decide on his release, to avoid suspicion and allow him to perform his tasks. Days later, the prison door opened, and Abdul Mun'im stood outside, inhaling the fresh air and swearing by God that he would not betray, yield, or bargain. He headed to a house to tell the owner that he urgently needed to see one of the mujahideen.

A few hours later, the man came to tell him to wait on a specific street at a particular hour in the evening. Abdul Mun'im waited there, where a car containing Ibrahim and Abdul Rahman soon arrived and took off. He informed them about his situation and his upcoming meeting with an intelligence officer, scheduled for Wednesday at 5:00 PM on a specific street in Beitunia, where he was to be picked up. They were to discuss the tasks he was required to perform,

and he proposed setting an ambush there to shoot the officer and his companions.

At the appointed time, Abdul Mun'im walked up and down the street, back and forth behind a not-so-high fence of an abandoned house. Ibrahim and Abdul Rahman lay in wait, each with a Kalashnikov, ready for the intelligence car's arrival. On the opposite back street, a getaway car waited with its driver. A Mercedes with an Arabic license plate appeared at the end of the street. Abdul Mun'im quickened his pace so the car would catch up to him opposite the ambush set by him and his brothers. The car stopped in front of him and opened its door for him to enter. As Abdul Mun'im approached the car, the plan was for him to duck to the ground when the car stopped and he reached its side, so that the shooting from the Kalashnikovs could commence. However, he did not pause and continued walking until he reached the car, reached into his belt, pulled out his pistol, and shot directly at the intelligence officer's head, shattering it. He aimed at the companion, but the driver sped away with the car. At that moment, Ibrahim and Abdul Rahman opened fire with their machine guns, then the three hurriedly left the scene in the waiting car, which sped away quickly.

Abdul Mun'im disappeared into a nearby village while Ibrahim and Abdul Rahman headed towards Hebron and its surroundings. The intelligence of the occupation went mad from the blow they received, which shook their image and pride. Their men did everything possible to capture or kill Abdul Mun'im and his associates.

Abdul Mun'im was a well-known name to the occupation forces, who distributed his photo to their soldiers, checkpoints, and informants. The search for him began, and one agent successfully identified him in a nearby town. He contacted his handlers from the intelligence service, who rushed to capture their prey. A medium-sized truck carrying vegetables, driven by a man dressed in traditional Arab clothing and wearing a black keffiyeh, pulled up behind the bus carrying Abdul Mun'im and his friend Zuhair. The bus stopped at a station in the town of Al-Ram, and Abdul Mun'im and his companion got off. Suddenly, the truck stopped, and from behind the vegetable crates, about ten special forces soldiers jumped out, brandishing their weapons and demanding Abdul Mun'im and his companion surrender and raise their hands. Instead, they drew their weapons and began shooting, but the occupation forces' bullets struck them down, and they fell as martyrs. Their souls ascended to the eternal gardens in a seat of truth near an omnipotent king. At this time, Ibrahim, along with the mujahideen in Hebron,

was preparing to carry out another martyrdom operation when they heard the news. They drove to a road leading to Jerusalem, where traffic from settler vehicles and patrol cars was particularly heavy near the Kharsina Hill junction leading to Kiryat Arba.

On the road, a settler stopped his car, waiting with his children for one of the commuter cars to Jerusalem, to take one of his children to a religious institute where he was studying in Jerusalem. The mujahideen's car passed by the settlers, where the mujahideen opened fire on them from their rifles, killing the settler and two others and injuring two more. The mujahideen then sped away to hide in a nearby village until the search operations calmed down.

The occupation forces rushed to the scene, imposing a curfew. Hebron remained tense during this period; every time the curfew was lifted and the mujahideen could move, they monitored new targets and struck, ensuring not a week or two passed without them killing or wounding occupation soldiers and settlers.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The crescent moon of Ramadan has risen, bringing with it a spirit of purity and worship, particularly notable as the number of people attending mosques increases, especially for the Fajr prayer. People leave for prayer after having their pre-dawn meal, the Suhoor.

Large numbers of worshippers flock to the Ibrahimi Mosque, gathering in readiness for prayer. The muezzin completes the call to prayer, and the worshippers stand to perform the two Sunnah rak'ahs of Fajr. After a brief pause, the muezzin signals the start of the prayer, and the worshippers straighten their rows, standing before God. The Imam starts with the Takbir, and the worshippers follow, then he recites Al-Fatiha: "Not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray" (Al-Fatiha 7). The response of the congregation, "Ameen," resonates powerfully, followed by silence. The Imam begins to recite verses from the beginning of Surah Al-Isra: "And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the scripture: You will surely cause corruption on the earth twice, and you will surely reach [a degree of] great haughtiness" (Al-Isra 4). The Imam then goes into Ruku and rises, says the Takbir, and prostrates.

While all worshippers are prostrating, a tall settler with a disheveled beard stands at the mosque's door. He raises his rifle and begins firing at the heads and backs of the worshippers in their prostration before God Almighty. He changes his magazine once, twice, thrice; the sound of gunfire rises as dozens of worshippers meet their Creator in prostration, their pure souls ascending from this position. Dozens more are drenched in their blood.

Shocked into action, some of the young men leap towards a metal fire extinguisher; one of them grabs it, charges at the wicked murderer, and smashes it onto his head, crushing his skull. Shouts of "Allahu Akbar" rise as the evacuation of the wounded and the martyrs begins.

The entire nation declares mourning for the martyrs of the sacred Ibrahimi Mosque. Masses take to the streets in protest against the gruesome massacre, only to meet the bullets of the occupation forces in every alley and street of the homeland.

The Israeli army had seemingly forgotten that their government had signed an agreement with the Palestinian side just a few weeks earlier, initiating their withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho as a prelude to peace agreements. Nevertheless, the army's bullets continued to claim dozens of lives, causing injuries to hundreds and casting a shadow over Palestine, a land deeply scarred by pain and suffering.

Meanwhile, in one of the houses in the village of Ya'bad al-Qassam and another in the town of Qabatiya, three young men meet in each house. They place their hands on the Quran and swear an oath not to rest or settle until they have avenged the blood of the martyrs at the Ibrahimi Mosque. Days later, a private car approaches a bus full of passengers in the city of Afula, within the Green Line, and crashes into it forcefully. The car explodes, causing significant damage to the bus, killing five passengers, and injuring dozens more, along with bystanders.

Days later, a young man wearing an explosive belt approaches a bus stop in the city of Hadera and detonates himself among the people there, killing several, injuring dozens, and causing extensive damage. Statements released confirm that this is part of the response to the massacre at the Ibrahimi Mosque and the killing of worshipers prostrating before God Almighty, promising more to come.

In Hebron, a number of mujahideen retreat after ambushing a settlers' car, firing upon it, then hiding in one of the apartments in a large residential building in the city. The Israeli forces and intelligence were on high alert after the severe and successive strikes by the mujahideen. An informant spotted the mujahideen as they entered the building. Within moments, hundreds of soldiers, led by top commanders and security officials, surrounded the building while thousands of troops spread throughout the city. Loudspeakers began calling for the mujahideen to come out of the building and surrender, to no avail.

The occupation forces demanded that residents evacuate the building. As they exited, their identities were scrutinized, and some were detained. Again, the forces called for the mujahideen to exit without response. Ground troops advanced to sweep through the building and were met with heavy machine gun fire, causing soldier screams and injuries. The response was a barrage of gunfire from hundreds of rifles aimed at the building, followed by silence.

The occupying forces waited for a while before another unit advanced towards the building, and gunfire erupted anew, eliciting screams. The response was a

hellish barrage of fire, and then silence fell. The occupying forces called in one of their massive bulldozers, which moved towards the house to start demolishing it after an intensive bombardment. As the bulldozer began to crush the walls, suddenly and swiftly, one of the fighters emerged from the debris, aimed his rifle at the bulldozer driver, and shot him in the head, halting the bulldozer. Before the soldiers and their commanders could react to what had happened, the ground had swallowed him.

Machine gun fire and rocket shells were again unleashed on the building, and the siege and hit-and-run tactics continued for three days and nights. Whenever the occupying forces approached the building, they were met with renewed gunfire. Eventually, the building was completely destroyed, leaving no stone upon another, and then the bulldozers came to search for the bodies of the fighters to confirm their deaths.

Ibrahim returned to Gaza in the last days before the official transfer of authority for the sector as the presence of Israeli forces dwindled, and Gaza was nearly free from the occupiers and their forces and institutions. The security situation had stabilized significantly, and the fear of their forces' pursuit and their agents' surveillance had greatly decreased. We welcomed him at home with hugs and tearful eyes, joyous at his safe return.

Upon Ibrahim's return, Maryam was a different person from the one who had bid him farewell. It seemed she had stored her gentleness and emotions for his return, and she burst into tears, her legs no longer able to support her as she tried to lean on the walls, then she collapsed to the ground. My mother broke her isolation and silence and ran to greet Ibrahim, kissing him and feeling his body as he bent down to kiss her hands.

From that night, we resumed sitting in my mother's room, gathering there normally. That night, we discussed the return of our brothers Majed and Khaled, and how and where we would welcome them. We were uneasy about discussing this in front of my mother, but it was the first time we had gathered in this way since the news had come, making our conversation disjointed. No one could fully articulate their thoughts clearly. My mother smiled, saying, "It seems you think I don't want them here at our home. I have no objections to welcoming them here, and they can stay with us as much as they like, for they are to me like any one of you, and this house is spacious."

My mother's words lifted a weight from our hearts that only God knew about, for we had feared she would reject the idea, thinking that part of her isolation stemmed from her feeling that the sons of her co-wife, who had suddenly appeared, would sit in her house among her own children. We agreed to temporarily clear two rooms for them, and I would stay with my mother in her room until we could better arrange things. We also discussed the issue of the Authority, its upcoming arrival, its jurisdiction, and how it should be dealt with by the opposition forces.

Of course, Mahmoud had a clear and decisive view that this Authority was an offshoot of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the legitimate and sole representative of the Palestinian people, meaning that there should be one authority under which everyone submits, and its decisions, policies, and agreements are binding on all. Here, Hassan became heated as he argued that the Oslo Accords were rejected by many sectors and forces within the Palestinian people, and it was a compromise of Palestinian national constants, and it binds no one except those who wish to adhere to it. Resistance, he argued, was its own authority, as no faction from the opposition was consulted in these accords, nor was there a general public referendum or election for Palestinians both inside and outside about such an agreement, and where Mahmoud could demand that forces and sectors, which see the agreement as a compromise of rights and constants, respect and abide by this agreement.

Mahmoud interrupted to argue that the Oslo Accords are an interim agreement and that Gaza and Jericho are just the beginning and that this agreement is under international witness, and it's not in our interest as Palestinians seeking international respect and sympathy to appear as if we do not respect or adhere to agreements.

Hassan cut him off, saying that those who signed the agreement can respect and adhere to it, but those who did not sign and were not consulted have nothing that can force them to comply. Mahmoud smiled and said that the days would force them to comply and respect the authority and the agreements signed. Hassan stated that no one could impose this on us, to which Mahmoud laughed and said: "If they don't comply with Moses' staff, they will comply with Pharaoh's staff tomorrow, when tens of thousands of fighters come from abroad, and tens of thousands more are handed over inside, we will see who can defy the decisions." Hassan shouted back: "Then those who come from abroad to suppress the resistance and stop operations against Israel will come."

Mahmoud laughs, saying, "You can name things whatever you like; we call it a national interest and a historical opportunity for us Palestinians to have a political entity after decades of occupation. This opportunity and supreme interest must be protected and imposed, even if some enthusiasts who cannot see beyond their noses will trade and risk this opportunity. We will find the moral justification and the material capability to control them and prevent them from doing so," says Mahmoud.

Hassan responds, "What a loss... what a loss. Here is Israel succeeding in fragmenting our Palestinian unity again, after years of unity under the Intifada."

Mahmoud shouts, "It is you who want to fragment our Palestinian unity. Why don't you give the leadership a chance in this project?" Hassan interrupts him: "What chance and why? A chance for the Jews to escape the pressure of the resistance that began to force them to pay heavy prices every day from the lives of their soldiers and settlers, and to divide us internally?"

Mahmoud cuts him off, "And how long will this resistance continue? How long?" Ibrahim answers him calmly and confidently, "Until the occupation is forced to leave and withdraw unconditionally, without commitments from us, Mahmoud, without us becoming partners to the occupiers in agreements that recognize the legitimacy and reality of their existence on our land."

Mahmoud screams, "All this is temporary and does not bind us when the balance of power changes." Ibrahim interrupts him in a calm voice, "But why the agreements? You know, and I know, and every observer knows that if Israel does not find a party to agree with to take over responsibility in Gaza and the West Bank, and with the ongoing resistance and the heavy costs of staying here, they will leave hurriedly. So, what's the use of an agreement with them? Why give them a graceful exit? And more importantly, why these restrictions imposed on the authority, the security cooperation, the joint patrols, the coordination and linkage? Why all this when we can impose other rules of the equation? They leave under the blows of resistance, and we remain free from all obligations and all these formations, designations, and complications."

Mahmoud then says, "Isn't it enough that the agreement will allow the return of tens of thousands of refugees from the resistance forces and their families?" Ibrahim replies: "That's good, and you know that every Palestinian is pleased with the return of every refugee to the homeland. We will cherish each one of them, and cut the bread from our mouths to provide them with a chance to live on the

homeland soil. But this cannot be the counterpart to that heavy price by providing a graceful exit for the occupation with a bright departure, according to an agreement, instead of a disgraceful escape under the blows of resistance and with agreements witnessed by international observers that recognize the Zionist entity and its right over the majority of our soil."

Mahmoud responds, "But all this is just the beginning. In time, negotiations on a permanent solution will commence, and you know that any agreements we sign today from a position of weakness will not bind us in the future when the balance of power shifts."

Then, Miriam stands up and says, "Thank God we are reunited here at your house, mom, to hear your political debates again. Let me go make some tea." At that moment, Hassan interjects, "Brother, I can't understand one thing—why do you insist on discussing negotiations? You're even talking about negotiations for a permanent solution, which means you will only negotiate with the Israelis about implementing Resolution 242."

"That means the Israelis have secured the borders of their state prior to June 5, 1967, and they will engage in clever negotiations to implement the resolution. That means they will negotiate with us about Jerusalem, about the return of the refugees, about dismantling the settlements, about the border line—which means they have secured more than 75% of the historical territories of Palestine, and they will start disputing us over the territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip..." Mahmoud interrupts, "No, that's not correct, all of that is stipulated in Resolution 242 and it's all temporary until the balance of power changes."

Ibrahim concurs, "God bless you, the Intifada and resistance are enough to force Israel to withdraw without any obligations from us—not recognizing them, no security cooperation or coordination, not turning our battle from a Palestinian one against them into an internal one."

Mahmoud continues, "All of this now will not be effective; what's required now is that everyone commits to the unity of the authority, to give a chance to what has happened so we can see the outcomes." Ibrahim laughs and says, "As if the fate of the people and the future of the cause are a trial field, to give a chance and wait to see the results. We are gambling with the sacrifices and blood of the martyrs in a gamble whose outcomes are known and decided, and the Israelis will give us nothing unless our boots are on their necks, and our resistance rifles are reaping them."

Mahmoud exclaims, "What are you saying, man? If the calculations are such, Israel could crush us in minutes." Ibrahim laughs, "Then why haven't they crushed us? The components of the equation are not merely about pure military strength, Mahmoud. Israel knows it faces an Arab and Islamic nation behind us, fragmented yes, but if it used excessive force against us, the balances of the universe would turn. Israel is unable to crush us because it is governed by many equations, and breaking any one of them means it could be crushed as well."

The waves of returnees from the Palestinian resistance and revolution began entering Gaza, particularly through the border crossing with Egypt. The joy of their return momentarily dissolved political and ideological disagreements, and ululations echoed in many Palestinian homes, celebrating the return of fathers and sons after long years of displacement and wandering among different countries and regions. Along with our neighbours, we shared the joy of their sons returning, and we awaited the arrival of our brothers, Majid and Khaled, who were among the last to arrive.

We prepared the house for their arrival, where I moved my belongings to my mother's room, and we prepared two beds and necessary items and clothes for them. Then, we went to receive them at the scheduled time on the Palestinian side of the border with Egypt. We waited for their exit, not knowing exactly whom we were waiting for since we had no pictures of them. However, we quickly recognized them through the bus window, as being twins made us believe they would look alike, in addition to the features that distinguish all of us and create a common bond of resemblance.

I shouted when I spotted them, "Khaled! Majid!" We met, and I waved my hand, shouting to my brothers and Ibrahim, "Here they are!" and rushed towards the bus, clinging to them. Behind me were Mahmoud, Hassan, and Ibrahim, as we all extended our hands to greet them while they leaned out of the windows, their eyes brimming with tears. Finally, after years of displacement, orphanhood, and separation, their family was welcoming them with all love and affection. My heart was pounding so hard that for a moment, I felt I might faint as I exclaimed, "I'm Ahmad!" and each of the others introduced themselves, "I'm Mahmoud, I'm Hassan, I'm Mohammed, I'm your cousin Ibrahim." Before the bus sped off, Ibrahim shouted, "We'll beat you to the Saraya in our car, God willing." They waved their hands, and we hurried to the car to follow the bus.

Those entering their apartments carried mattresses, blankets, food, and drink, and came out asking Ibrahim to drive them to the Saraya building to deliver these

items to the new fighters from the authority forces, who might stay at the Saraya permanently or those without families to return to their homes. Ibrahim also entered his apartment and came out loaded, as did Mahmoud, and they all loaded everything onto Ibrahim's car, which then headed to the Saraya. There, at the Saraya, hundreds, even thousands, of citizens carried mattresses, blankets, and food, entering to deliver them to the men who were amazed by what they saw of their people's generosity, their eyes brimming with tears.

The Palestinian Authority began gradually taking control in the Gaza Strip, organizing its affairs. At the same time, Israel started releasing some Palestinian prisoners detained for years, though the numbers were significantly fewer than expected. Israeli authorities began to categorize prisoners into different groups—those from organizations supportive of the Oslo Accords, those opposed, and those with blood on their hands, with the latter not being eligible for release.

These classifications became a topic of discussion among every Palestinian as there was hardly a household without a family member imprisoned by the occupation. Everyone had hoped their loved one would be released following the signing of the agreements, but the numbers released were disappointingly low.

Ibrahim agreed with "Salah," who was still studying at Birzeit University, on a plan to try and resolve part of this problem. Salah traveled to Nablus in the West Bank, where he met with hidden mujahideen, including Yahya and the two who had survived an encounter in Jerusalem months earlier. They discussed the plan; one of them, "Hassan," thought the plan feasible and called upon two acquaintances from Jerusalem to assist with their expertise. They arrived within hours; one of them, "Zaki," confirmed he had a secluded villa suitable for holding the soldier they planned to kidnap, along with those who would guard him. Zaki assured that he could visit the house regularly without raising suspicion to provide food and updates. Another mujahid confirmed the ease of acquiring a vehicle for the kidnapping, volunteering to drive during the mission and to transport them to Jerusalem, where Zaki would show him the villa.

Indeed, on Saturday evening, Mujahid arrived driving a transport truck. He picked up the three mujahideen—Salah, Hassan, and Abdel Karim—along with their weapons and some belongings, and drove them towards Jerusalem to the quiet, serene town of Birnabala to a secluded villa. He dropped them off with their necessities and parted with plans to return the next day to execute the mission.

On Sunday afternoon, Mujahid returned with his vehicle, picked up the others along with their light weapons, and headed to Jerusalem. Along the way, a soldier flagged down passing cars, seeking a ride home. The car stopped, the soldier asked if they were headed towards his residential area, and, speaking Hebrew, they confirmed and invited him to join. Shortly after setting off, they revealed their pistols and demanded his silence for his safety; they intended to keep him alive to exchange for prisoners, not to harm him.

After securing and blindfolding the soldier, they turned the car towards Birnabala, drove into a garage at the designated house, and led the soldier to a second-floor room with heavily curtained windows. There, they videotaped him with a mujahid standing behind, demanding that his government meet the kidnappers' demands. Mujahid took the tape, the soldier's rifle, and ID to Gaza, where he placed them at a prearranged spot for Ibrahim to pick up. A video was then made showing a masked mujahid displaying the soldier's rifle and ID, demanding the release of five hundred Palestinian prisoners, including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. This tape was delivered to a journalist who distributed it to news agencies.

Within an hour, television networks broadcasted the video, and the next day, a second tape was released showing the soldier and giving the Israeli government until Friday evening to comply or the soldier would be executed. This prompted intense searches, raids, and intelligence operations by Israeli security forces. Because the tapes were released from Gaza, the Israeli government pressured the Palestinian Authority to fulfill its agreements and cooperate in finding and returning the soldier while punishing the kidnappers. Following necessary investigations, the Authority informed the Israeli government unequivocally that the soldier was not held in areas under their control.

On Thursday night, a large force raided Mujahid's home in Beit Hanina, arresting him and taking him to an army camp near Ramallah for severe interrogation. The head of Shin Bet at the time sought judicial permission to use all forms of physical and psychological torture against Mujahid to force a confession about the soldier's whereabouts. After enduring hours of brutal interrogation post-dawn, Mujahid finally disclosed the location of the hidden soldier.

On Friday evening, after performing the Maghrib prayer at Al-Aqsa Mosque, "Zaki" drove to pick up some Jerusalem kunafa, taking it with him back to Birnabala. Upon entering the house with the kunafa box, the mujahideen shared it with the captive soldier. Zaki inquired if they needed anything else; they declined, so he left them and drove away. Behind him, a vehicle carrying special

forces trailed and stopped him at the Ram checkpoint, where soldiers dramatically extracted him from his car, thoroughly searching it for any useful items.

Minutes before 8 PM, a large number of special forces personnel stealthily approached the house, splitting into two teams. The first team climbed to the balcony connected to the kitchen on the second floor to enter from there, while the second team set off explosions simultaneously. Ready with their arms, soldiers stormed in from both directions. Those entering from the kitchen were closest to the room where the soldier was held and where the mujahideen were stationed. As they entered, they were met with a barrage of gunfire from the mujahideen's rifles. The second team, entering the ground floor, also faced gunfire. The raid resulted in the death of the assault unit leader, thirteen soldiers wounded, and the captive soldier killed. The intense exchange and bombardment led to the martyrdom of the three mujahideen inside.

Days later, "Yahya" prepared an explosive belt for "Saleh," who, along with his accomplice "Asim," headed towards the heart of Tel Aviv. They took a bus to Tel Aviv's central station and then boarded bus number 5 to central Tel Aviv. In the midst of bustling Dizengoff Street, Saleh pressed the detonator attached to his belt, triggering a massive explosion that transformed the bus into flaming wreckage, killing over twenty people, injuring dozens, and causing significant destruction in the area.

Television broadcasts showed live images from the scene of the operation soon after it occurred, revealing the true horror in people's eyes and hundreds of cases of panic and nervous breakdowns. None of the occupiers ever dreamed they would see such death and destruction in the centre of Tel Aviv, thinking they could instill fear and death in our towns, villages, and camps. However, the spell turned against the sorcerer, and those who sow thorns reap only thorns.

Following the Dizengoff operation, investigations and arrests brought Yahya's name to the forefront again. He became a symbol of terror for Israeli citizens and a cause of concern and fear for political, military, and security leaders. Raids on his family's house increased, surveillance intensified on his village and on everyone suspected of having any connection with Yahya. It became clear that Yahya's continued presence in the West Bank, which was still under Israeli occupation, was difficult and nearly impossible. Therefore, Yahya decided to move to Gaza for a while to hide there safely and then return later.

I met him at Ibrahim's apartment when he came after dark for safety. One day, I went to Ibrahim's apartment needing something, knocked on the door, and entered to find a young man there—quiet, reserved, and spoke succinctly. It wasn't hard to recognize from his accent that he was from the West Bank and not from Gaza. In Gaza, we pronounce the letter "qaf" either like the Egyptian "gim" or, as in the main cities, like a glottal stop, while most people from the West Bank pronounce it like "kaf." From his first word, I identified his West Bank origins. I didn't want to embarrass him or Ibrahim by asking his name or where he lived, but I knew then he was from the West Bank. Later, I saw him frequently visiting Ibrahim and staying overnight. After a while, his wife and son came to stay with Ibrahim for a few days before leaving and then returning. Ibrahim explained that he was a friend from the West Bank working in Gaza, and to save on travel, effort, and money, he sometimes stayed over to sort out his new living arrangements.

An official from the Preventive Security Service summoned Ibrahim to his office to discuss certain behaviors and actions under the new reality of the Palestinian Authority's presence in Gaza. The man reiterated multiple times that the situation had changed from the occupation days; now, there was a Palestinian Authority with signed international agreements and international oversight, which should not be violated.

Ibrahim responded frankly, not hiding his opposition to the Oslo Accords and all that ensued from them. He viewed these as a failure in politically leveraging events, convinced that a strategic mistake had been made by signing the Oslo Accords. This mistake, he argued, recognized Israel in exchange for a price that Israel would have eventually paid without receiving anything from us—just needed the persistence of resistance, which would have forced the occupation to withdraw from our areas under pressure.

The official interrupted, clarifying that his role wasn't to debate the political validity of the agreement but to make Ibrahim understand that he must not undermine the authority's legitimacy or put the authority in a difficult position by appearing to breach the agreements.

Ibrahim smiled and said, "See? For something Israel would have naturally paid under the pressure of resistance, we are now asked to divide into two groups: one wishing to continue the resistance and the other seeking to halt it to comply with commitments and agreements." The official, growing impatient, insisted that there was no division—there was the authority, which was legitimate and responsible,

and there were citizens who must comply with its decisions for the greater national interest of the Palestinian people.

Attempting to calm the situation, Ibrahim smiled and suggested dialing down the tension as they were just having a discussion. The official smiled back, acknowledging the point but emphasized that they were at the beginning of their journey towards achieving national goals of establishing an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. It was crucial, he noted, to ensure that actions taken now did not hinder these goals.

Ibrahim smiled, saying, "I hope all our goals that you mentioned, as well as our other objectives, are achieved. I am fully convinced that they will not be realized in the way you've proposed; that is, through negotiation alone. These can be achieved through the barrel of a gun, for our enemies understand no language but that of gunpowder and fire. Time will prove you wrong in this path, and it won't be long until we see that after the negotiations on the final settlement..." He was then interrupted by the man who said, "Then God will create what you do not know. But for now, I hope you understand the purpose of your summons here, and I urge you to comply and not to put us in a difficult position between violating the agreements the Authority has signed and having to arrest and jail you and your friends." Ibrahim, smiling as he stood up to leave, murmured: "God willing, all will be well."

A young man from Islamic Jihad, wearing the uniform of the occupying army, carrying an explosive bag on his back, steadily approached the cafeteria where dozens of soldiers were gathered at Beit Lid junction. He moved through the crowd until he was among them, pressed the electric button, and his bag exploded, causing fatalities and numerous injuries. The screams and wails escalated as soldiers, medics, security personnel, and police converged on the site. Then another young man from Islamic Jihad, also dressed in the army uniform and carrying an explosive bag, hurried towards the crowd as if he were one of the medics or soldiers rushing to the scene. He blended in with the crowd and detonated his bag, resulting in another deafening explosion that killed more, wounded many, and caused further destruction. From a distance, the medics, soldiers, and law enforcement officers trembled, looking at each other in fear and suspicion, as twenty-five soldiers were killed and many others were wounded.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

As my mother emerged from her seclusion and began spending evenings in her room again, she reignited the discussion about my marriage. I had been preoccupied with other matters, but with her persistence and repeated mention, I agreed for her to look for a girl she liked for me. Indeed, every few days she would suggest a girl—asking what I thought about so-and-so's daughter—though I knew none of these girls. She would then critique them herself: one was a bit short, another's skin was a bit dark, before searching again almost daily. Eventually, she found a girl she liked, presented the idea to me, and I accompanied her to visit the girl's family. I liked the girl, and we soon held the engagement and the marriage contract.

After Ibrahim suggested I share his apartment during this period, the visits by the young man from the West Bank, "Yahya," to us became less frequent. When I asked Ibrahim about him, he told me Yahya had rented a house and settled there, but he still came by to visit for a few hours at a time.

During this period, a young man named Abdul-Wahid from Nablus frequented the Islamic University where he met Ibrahim and Yahya. Yahya taught him how to prepare explosives, known in their code as "Umm al-Abd," including how to make belts and bombs. Abdul-Wahid understood the requirements well and returned to Nablus where he rented an apartment, bought the necessary materials and tools, and began preparing the explosives with one of his brothers. He then began looking for a young man willing to carry out a martyrdom operation and for someone who could transport him to a major Israeli settlement in the territories occupied in 1948.

On the afternoon of July 21, 1995, a young Palestinian man boarded an Israeli bus in Ramat Gan. Shortly after the bus departed, he detonated himself inside, killing five and wounding thirty-three. Meanwhile, Abdul-Wahid was preparing a second belt and searching for another martyr. Everything was ready: the belt, the martyr, and the transporter were all prepared for the operation.

Days later, while Abdul-Wahid was making a phone call from a public telephone, he was attacked by special forces of the occupation army. He was arrested and taken to an interrogation centre.

Right away, the interrogation of Abdul-Wahid began about everything concerning the operation that had occurred and any other preparations. Hour after hour, day and night, torment rained down on him as he denied any involvement, hoping to buy time for the second martyr to carry out his operation.

Just before the scheduled time for the operation, he confessed to the interrogators about the operation that had been carried out, pleasing them with a victory and success to report to their superiors, telling them they had extracted a confession from the planner of the martyrdom operation.

They left briefly, and then the second explosion occurred. A young man boarded one of the buses in Jerusalem (Ramat Eshkol) and detonated himself inside, killing five and injuring one hundred and three. While the interrogators boasted about their success in extracting a confession from Abdul-Wahid, their communication devices suddenly rang, and an email notified them of a new martyrdom operation with the same characteristics as the previous one. They rushed back to Abdul-Wahid, beating and kicking him as he laughed deep inside while they screamed, "You tricked us, you laughed at us, you are behind this!" And he just smiled and nodded affirmatively.

With these operations deep within the Zionist entity, its leaders found themselves in a difficult position—they were caught between the operations that struck deep into their territory, shaking everyone's sense of security and stability, and the pressure from right-wing extremists who opposed handing over more areas to the Palestinian Authority. Yet, they were convinced that the only solution to these operations was to withdraw from the Palestinian residential areas and hand them over to the Palestinians who might be better able to stop them. The leaders of the entity then publicly declared that they would continue the peace process, as if nothing had happened, which infuriated the extremists. Massive demonstrations erupted in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv against the government and the handing over of areas to the Authority and against yielding to what they called Palestinian terrorism. Many Jewish rabbis and religious leaders emerged, forbidding the handing over of lands to the Palestinians, and refusing to relinquish them to the Authority. Tensions boiled over daily, and the government and security forces increasingly believed that the best thing was to throw this hot potato into someone else's lap to deal with it.

We were sitting in my mother's room, watching TV and observing the developments. Ibrahim was smiling as he watched the news, which irritated "Mahmoud" who burst out asking: "What makes you smile? Can I understand the

reason for it?" Ibrahim laughed and said, "Do you see the dilemma our enemies have gotten themselves into?" Mahmoud asked, "What dilemma? We are in a dilemma now!" Ibrahim laughed again and said, "We are in a dilemma? Look, man, do you see the terrible division that has reached the Israeli street, the boiling and tension among them to the point that one might kill another? And how their leaders, despite the operations, come out yelling that they will continue the peace process? Do you think if there were not such operations from areas still under their control, which they cannot prevent, while the areas they have withdrawn from have calmed down and no longer launch such operations, do you think they would have left them?"

Mahmoud said yes, that's the agreement. Hassan laughed and said, "You are delusional, my brother, and you don't know these people. When have they voluntarily given us our rights? When have they recognized these rights at all? And when have they adhered to agreements and covenants, as if you have not heard the verse 'Whenever they make a covenant, a party of them throw it away' (Al-Baqara: 100)." Mahmoud shouted, saying, "You want to attribute everything to yourselves, as if you are the reason for every success. This is how you want to portray things." Ibrahim smiled and said, "We are describing a reality, Mahmoud. The Intifada forced them to recognize us and our rights. Just days before the Intifada, our name was 'inhabitants of the territories,' and after two months we became 'Palestinians of the territories,' then simply 'Palestinians.' Then they were forced to sit down with the PLO, which they considered a terrorist and destructive organization, and here they are, having exited the sector, and I see their situation under the strikes of the resistance declaring that they will exit the West Bank..."

Mahmoud interrupted, saying, "But don’t you realize that this could turn things upside down and ruin the entire peace process?" Hassan laughed and said, "I wish it would ruin it and go to hell." Mahmoud screamed, "This is what you want. You are gambling with the future of the cause and the supreme interests of the Palestinian people. The Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank is imminent, and the declaration of a Palestinian state is near, and you are carrying out these operations with the aim of sabotaging that."

Ibrahim smiled, saying, "Listen Mahmoud, we've already discussed this. We believe the Oslo Accords are a strategic goal, a ladder for the occupation to descend from a tree they would have fallen from. Had you not built them this ladder, they would have fled Gaza and the West Bank without any concessions

from us..." Mahmoud interrupted, saying, "You've mentioned that this is merely a tactic, serving us in a time when we are weak until the balance of powers shifts..." Ibrahim countered, "We disagree with you on this and see it as a mistake. But now, we start from a different point, not just about the correctness or mistake of Oslo. We're starting from the continuation of operations in areas still under occupation, while there's relative calm in areas they've withdrawn from and handed over to the authority. This is the best way to adjust their withdrawal from these areas without stalling..." Mahmoud interrupted, "So, you want to attribute the liberation of every inch of our land to your resistance, not to the wisdom and experience of the Palestinian negotiator..." Hasan interjected, "What need do we have for a negotiator and his wisdom? They would have fled Gaza and the West Bank anyway. Haven't you seen the news, or are you living in another world?" During this conversation, Khalid and Majid sat together, their eyes wide with astonishment as they watched the speakers, a sight that caught Maryam's attention. She asked, "What's the matter with you, Khalid and Majid?" They responded in unison, "Ah, what?" She said, "Why do you look so astonished? Your eyes are fixed on everyone who speaks." Khalid replied, "Honestly, such a calm political discussion, it's as if you in the Occupied Territories are hearing such a high level of political awareness and current affairs for the first time."

A Jewish extremist, lying in wait for Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, with a military past and his pistol loaded, wanted to kill Rabin as punishment for his betrayal in handing over lands to the Palestinians. Rabin was leaving a large rally organized to show public support for him in the peace process, surrounded by his guards, when the extremist, Yigal Amir, burst forth, drew his pistol, and shot him dead.

We were about to leave my mother's room and move to ours as it was getting late when suddenly the TV programming was interrupted, and news of Rabin's shooting was broadcast. He had been taken to the hospital. We sat back down to follow the developments with anticipation and soon it was announced that he had died. None of us was pleased about Rabin's death, one of the most brutal butchers who had committed crimes against our people over the years. No one could forget his recent history when he ordered the bone-breaking policy against Palestinian citizens during the Intifada, nor his role in the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, among other crimes against our people and nation. However, "Mahmoud" was worried about the future of the peace process, given Rabin's strong personality and his significant history in serving Israel and ensuring its continuity, he was the most capable of advancing it.

The assassination of Rabin turned the Israeli public opinion polls on their head; before the assassination, these polls indicated that the right was ahead of the left in the upcoming elections which were nearing, suggesting a likely victory for the right after the assassination. Because the assassin was identified with the right-wing opposed to Rabin's policy, the Israeli public switched allegiance, and the polls now favored the left, indicating that "Shimon Peres," Rabin's successor, and his party might win the upcoming elections.

Yahya was hiding in a house in the Beit Lahia housing project. Israeli intelligence had identified this house and managed to deliver a mobile phone to the house owner through one of its agents, which Yahya used to contact his family in the West Bank. The device malfunctioned, so the owner took it for repair and then returned it to Yahya to call his father. On Friday (1996/1/5), as soon as Yahya put it to his ear to speak, the device exploded, blowing his head off, marking another success for Israeli intelligence in their war against resistance. Thus, the house owner quickly contacted the militants to inform them of the calamity, and several of them, including Ibrahim, rushed to the Beit Lahia house to see what had happened, tears welling in their eyes.

Within hours, the news had spread to every household in the homeland that cherished Yahya deeply. Yahya, the engineer Yahya Ayyash, had settled into the hearts and souls of the tormented in Palestine and admirers across the Arab and Muslim world, stirring feelings of dignity and pride that had been dormant for a long time. He had managed to strike at the core of hostility in its den, instilling terror and panic, marking a new equation in the struggle against the brutal occupation. The news spread like wildfire, and the masses throughout the homeland poured into the streets seeking confirmation, hardly believing what they heard. Yahya had become a legend; people shouted and cheered and called for vengeance. The next day, the entire Gaza Strip came out to bid farewell to Yahya at his funeral, turning Gaza into a tumultuous sea of people mourning the martyr, chanting for sacrifice with their souls and blood, screaming for revenge... for the Qassam Brigades.

Abdul-Rahim, my cousin Fathiya’s son, had agreed with some of his mosque peers to form a military cell to continue the path of the martyr "Abu Rashdi," deeply influenced by the assassination of the martyr who had become a role model for many youths. They decided to start their mission as a reprisal for his pure blood.

Their cars hit the main road between Bethlehem and Hebron, where military and settler vehicles frequently traveled. Near the town of Beit Ummar, they spotted a white car with a license plate indicating it belonged to a military officer. Accelerating, they started to overtake it, while Abdul-Rahim opened fire with his Kalashnikov rifle and one of his friends began shooting from his pistol. As they passed, the car swerved off the road and crashed into the roadside, killing a military doctor with the rank of colonel and his accompanying soldier. Abdul-Rahim felt he had partially fulfilled his duty towards the martyr's blood.

In a rural house in the town of Al-Satar Al-Gharbi, near Khan Younis, four militants, including Ibrahim, sat planning a severe retaliatory strike against the occupation for its crimes. The next night, a group of militants crept carrying backpacks and dragging two long wooden ladders towards the barbed wire of the border fence separating Gaza (its eastern part) from Israel proper in 1948. They remained in the dark for a long time, ensuring the area was clear of enemy forces, then two ran towards the wall carrying the ladders. They set the first ladder almost vertically and one held it while the other began to climb with the second ladder in his hands. As he lifted the second ladder to throw it over to the other side of the border fence, lights from a patrolling jeep appeared in the distance. Quickly, they withdrew the ladders and erased their tracks with a tree branch, then hid behind a sand dune just moments before the patrol's spotlight could catch them.

The patrol passed and moved away, allowing the militants to set up the first ladder again. One of them climbed it and threw the end of the second ladder to the other side of the fence, then secured the tops of the ladders together. Three militants each carrying a heavy backpack, climbed the first ladder and descended the second into the darkness on the other side, swiftly disappearing. The remaining militants quickly pulled the ladders back, erasing any signs of their crossing, making it appear as if nothing had happened.

The three militants advanced westward, deep into the territories occupied in 1948, distancing themselves from the border strip. A car awaited them, which transported them to a vast orchard near the city of Ashdod. There, they dug and buried their backpacks. Two of them returned to Gaza, while the third stayed, wrapped in a large piece that shielded him from the rain among the dense orange trees, which bent over him, enveloping him with their branches and leaves in affection and tenderness to shield him from enemy eyes. He waited for the arrival of the martyrs who were to come in the second group.

Time passed heavily, and no one came. The appointed time was far exceeded, and as days passed, it became clear that a problem had arisen. Hassan decided to act on his initiative to complete the mission. He left for Ramallah, where he contacted some acquaintances searching for youths ready for martyrdom. He found two eager for the cause, then went to Abu Dis to look for assistants to retrieve the backpacks carrying the belts and to transport the martyrs to their targets.

He found two people with cars. Together with one of them, he retrieved the three backpacks from the orchard near Ashdod and transferred them to Ramallah and then to Abu Dis. In the early morning hours, two cars departed from Abu Dis, each carrying a martyr wearing a belt, fasting, and sworn not to consume any food or drink from the earth, believing that his break-fast would be in Paradise, by God's will, with the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

One car headed straight to the heart of West Jerusalem where one of the martyrs stepped out with determination towards bus number 18, which was packed with passengers. After the bus had traveled a few meters, he pressed the button on his belt, causing a loud explosion. The bus turned into a mass of flaming metal, scattering bodies and limbs, killing dozens. Ambulances, explosives experts, police, and security personnel rushed to the scene.

While they were occupied, news of another explosion at a soldier waiting station at the entrance to the occupied city of Ashkelon came through, where many were killed and injured. The call to Maghrib prayer sounded, prompting Hassan to rush to the next room to wake "Raed" for his meal since he had been fasting. Raed, sitting up in his bed, looked at Hassan who told him it was time for Maghrib, inviting him to break his fast. Raed smiled and said, "I will not taste your food in this land."

I had a dream that I boarded a bus filled with occupiers and blew myself up, killing everyone on board. Then, I saw myself ascending to heaven in a pillar of light. Hassan insisted again, "The food is ready, let's eat," but Raed reprimanded him, saying, "I told you, I will not eat anything from this land." He then performed ablution and they prayed Maghrib together.

In the early hours of the morning, Raed, strapped with an explosive belt, departed in Karim’s car, which had previously taken his brother to the heart of Jerusalem. Arriving at the same location, he got out of the car and with firm steps, boarded bus number 18. Shortly after it departed, he detonated himself, killing

all twenty-three passengers instantly and injuring dozens in the street, as his soul ascended to his Lord, fulfilling his desired martyrdom.

Days later, a mujahid from the Islamic Jihad blew himself up in the middle of Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv, killing thirteen occupiers. This threw the rulers of the Zionist entity into panic, spreading terror among them. The streets, institutions, restaurants, cafes, and buses became deserted, and the leader pounded the table, demanding that the authority fulfill its obligations to stop what he called "terrorism from its controlled areas." Consequently, the authority began a widespread arrest campaign against Islamic activists in its areas, detaining hundreds and subjecting dozens to terrifying interrogations.

My brother Majed unexpectedly came home from work in the early afternoon, inquiring about Ibrahim, who was not at home. Majed whispered to me that there was an order to arrest Ibrahim and that he needed to disappear. He then left to return to work, and I went out to find Ibrahim. I informed him about the situation at a friend's house, and immediately arranged for him to stay hidden at an unknown friend's house. I took his car and returned home to inform Maryam and my mother that he was wanted and had gone into hiding to avoid arrest by the security forces until things calmed down.

In the evening, we gathered in my mother's room, where the conversation revolved around the latest operations, the widespread arrests, and the rumors of harsh interrogation techniques against some of the detainees.

Hassan was in a state of anger I had never seen before, and my mother had to ask him several times to lower his voice so he wouldn't be heard outside and risk being arrested too. He was yelling at Mahmoud, "How can they arrest these honorable people? And put them in prisons when they have shouldered the burden of resisting the occupation in recent years and forced it to leave?"

Mahmoud laughed and said, "That's what you and your group think is important. They want to sabotage the peace process and gamble with the highest national interests of the Palestinian people. There must be a limit to this."

Hassan shouted, "What interests are you talking about, man? Are the interests of the Palestinian people to arrest the honorable and humiliate them in interrogation cells? Is that the interests of the Palestinian people?!"

Mahmoud interrupted him, "The supreme national interest is the establishment of our independent Palestinian state in the coming years, after we conduct negotiations for a permanent solution."

Hassan screamed, "Who started the aggression? Was it us who carried out operations first, or was it your peace partner, Israel, that assassinated Yahya Ayyash? And what do you want us to do about that? Should we remain silent so Israel dares to assassinate others? And what did you do when they assassinated Yahya, may God have mercy on him? What did you do?"

Mahmoud responds, "You act with intellect and wisdom. It was your duty to give peace a chance, but you did not. Instead, in 1995..." Hassan interjects, "These operations took place in areas under occupation control, not yet handed over to the Authority, so why make that connection?" Mahmoud explains, "These operations pressured the Israeli government, leading them to decide to assassinate Ayash." Hassan exclaims, "So if the Israeli government is pressured by their extremists, it should relieve itself by assassinating our people's icons? And we should just watch, give them a chance, and not disrupt the hollow peace process? And if the honorable retaliate for the engineer's blood, they must be arrested and beaten in cells?" Mahmoud interjects, "No one was beaten in the cells..." Hassan counters, "But it has been done, it is happening!" and turns to Majed and Khaled, "Isn't that right, Majed? Isn't that right, Khaled? Weren't people beaten and humiliated?" Both nod affirmatively. Mahmoud claims, "They are not beaten for their actions against the occupation but because they plan to assassinate leaders of the Authority." Hassan shouts, "That's not true! That's a lie, pure slander. It's impossible anyone planned assassinations. You've seen with your own eyes how we welcomed the Authority's men, the revolution forces from abroad. You've seen how we respected them, opened our hearts..." Mahmoud cuts him off, "But now you act oppositely. Don't you see how you've opened the gates of hell on Israel? Three massive operations in eight days, dozens dead, hundreds injured. What are you thinking? This is madness!"

Maryam intervenes, "How can you arrest his brother, imprison and torture him?" Khaled and Majed respond, "We have nothing to do with it; we're just small soldiers following orders, we don't understand politics..." Mahmoud retorts, "When a brother seeks to undermine his family's plans and destroy their interests, he must be restrained." Maryam exclaims, "Do you not have a heart? How can you arrest your brothers for acting against the occupation, or your sister's husband, your cousin? Have you become so heartless?" Mahmoud reassures, "It's

only for a short while. They'll be released in a few days or months, just to relieve the pressure on us."

Hassan screams, "Then why the interrogation, the torture, the mistreatment?" Mahmoud explains, "As I said, that's for those proven involved in plotting against the Authority." Hassan yells, "That's just an excuse, a clear lie!" Mahmoud laughs, "You don't understand what's happening, Hassan. Your group wants to destroy the world; you are insane!" Hassan retorts, "We act without reason! We'll see, Mahmoud. It won't be long before it becomes clear that the Jews have deceived you, trapped you in your schemes. These killed the innocents, fought against God and His Messenger; they have no covenant or dignity. You think in what you call the final status negotiations they will concede Jerusalem or the settlements, return to the pre-June 5th lines? This is all just an attempt to divide us, pit us against each other, and sabotage our national interests."

Mahmoud laughs, "Now you think you understand politics, predicting the future?!" Hassan smiles, "It's not what I expect, brother. It's what God has told us about them, about their nature, their dealings. These do not honor agreements or advance in the right direction unless they feel threatened, scared. History repeats itself; Jews are Jews. You'll see, Mahmoud, and I'll remind you if we're still here."

After a few days, Hassan was arrested, and after a while, we were allowed to visit him. We learned that he had not been interrogated or tortured. However, he confirmed to us that others had been subjected to insane torture, and some had sustained physical injuries from such torture. My mother could not bear Hassan's arrest by the Authority. During our visits, she incessantly cursed at them and the guards and officers who managed the prison entries and exits. They did not respond, pretending not to hear or being preoccupied with other things. Sometimes, when the curses were direct, one of them would politely respond, "May Allah end your days in goodness, Hajjah. We are just following orders; this is our livelihood and that of our children."

One day, Majed whispered to me that he and Khaled had been ordered to immediately report any information about Ibrahim. If they failed to report any information, they would be punished. It was essential not to embarrass them with their superiors, and we must not hide any information about him. He also advised me not to take Mariam, Isra, and Yasser to Ibrahim when he and Khaled were at home, but rather when they were at work. I was to instruct Mariam, Isra, and Yasser not to talk about it, and we needed to concoct another reason for them to leave the house.

The Israeli election was approaching, and polls showed a clear lead for Likud's candidate, "Benjamin Netanyahu," for Prime Minister over the Labor Party's candidate, "Shimon Peres." Those betting on the peace process or Oslo and its outcomes began to feel real danger from the elections. At home, we were keen to monitor and wait for the results, which were crucial for all of us. Mahmoud wanted the Labor Party to win as it would ensure the continuation of the peace process, enabling the Authority to achieve its goals. He was very concerned about a Likud victory under Netanyahu, which would likely complicate matters. At home, we were unsure what we wanted exactly; Mahmoud's analysis had some merit, and at the very least, we needed to understand the end of this tunnel that our Palestinian cause had entered, and to see the validity of the perspectives and stance that led to Oslo, and what it had produced in terms of interests, dealings, and policies. However, there was a desire to see how things would unfold with a right-wing Likud victory. So, our opinion was not decisive or clear, but we waited and followed the news all night. Sleep overtook us before learning the results, and in the morning, we learned of Netanyahu's and the "cursed" Likud's victory.

To our surprise and everyone else's, Netanyahu as the leader of the opposition was quite different from Netanyahu as the Prime Minister. It seems that the position, along with international relations and diplomatic communications, had a significant impact on theoretical stances. This field of friction between ideological positions and political and pragmatic pressures produces pragmatic stances. Therefore, we continued to monitor the Israeli government's stance regarding the handover of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority. Netanyahu could not completely disregard the previous agreement with the Authority, but he adhered to it formally, transforming the agreement into new agreements and inventing new terms for dividing or controlling areas of Hebron.

My cousin Abdel-Rahim, the son of my aunt Fathiya, had finished his short prison term some time ago and worked in construction before going to study nursing.

My brother Hassan remained imprisoned by the Authority under reasonable conditions. After Likud's victory in the elections, they began allowing him home stays over the weekends, letting him spend Fridays with us at home, which eliminated the need for us to visit him in prison. On Saturday mornings, he would return to prison, but if there was an emergency at home, they usually allowed him to come.

Ibrahim remained hidden all this time, but his movements became easier and safer as the security attention from the Authority had significantly decreased. However, he continued to maintain a level of secrecy in his movements and in the places he frequented.

My mother has been pressing me hard to see a specialist doctor, as it has become clear that there might be an issue with either me or my wife regarding having children. I tried to ignore this for a while, but she is right, and this matter has started to occupy a significant part of our attention.

After Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in Israel, tensions began to escalate between him and the Palestinian Authority. A significant incident that fueled these tensions was related to news about a tunnel that the Israeli government was constructing beneath the Al-Aqsa Mosque, allegedly threatening the mosque's stability. This news incited public outrage, leading to angry demonstrations in the streets and violent clashes between the Palestinian Authority forces and Israeli forces at various friction points, including exchanges of gunfire. Many Israeli soldiers and several Palestinian police officers were killed. My brother Khaled participated in the clashes at the Erez border crossing, where he was stationed. He was shot in the shoulder, which was then cast in plaster, and he was given medical leave. Surprisingly, during his medical leave, he was summoned and fined 500 shekels by a military court for firing at the Erez checkpoint without prior authorization.

As the situation with the Israeli government continued to tense, relationships within the Palestinian Authority seemed to improve toward the opposition. Many prisoners were released, including my brother Hassan, who returned home to his wife and children after nearly a year.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

In the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood of Gaza City, the Abu Nidal family gathered in their home—Abu Nidal, Umm Nidal, Nidal, Mohammad, and two daughters. Mohammad, around twenty-five, notably favored eating olives, catching Umm Nidal's attention. She asked, "Mohammad, why do you only eat olives? Don't you like other dishes, my son?" Mohammad replied, "I do like everything, Mother, but I love olives the most. Isn't this the olive from our tree under which Emad was martyred?" A tear escaped Umm Nidal's eye as she said, "May God have mercy on him, yes, my son." Mohammad added, "That's why I love them. I feel like these olives pulse with Emad's spirit; I love them deeply because I loved Emad."

It became clear that the peace process had stalled significantly after Netanyahu's rise to power in Israel. The situation worsened daily, reinforcing the skepticism of those opposed to the Oslo Accords. This content was a frequent subject of discussion between my brother Hassan and others in our home, in our mother's room. Mahmoud often countered Hassan's points, blaming their actions for Netanyahu's rise and the stalling of the planned peace process. Everyone agreed that the peace process had either frozen or ended entirely.

Abdel Rahim, along with two other mujahideen, drove their car on the main road near Beit Shemesh in the territories occupied since 1948, only a few kilometers from the town of Surif. Armed with loaded AK-47 rifles, they waited for a settlers' car to pass. They observed a vehicle crash into the roadside, killing both passengers inside. Days later, Abdel Rahim and his brothers sat in the town mosque after Maghrib prayer, discussing their lives. Abdel Rahim said to his brothers, "Thousands of Palestinian prisoners have been released from the occupation's prisons, but our brothers who oppose Oslo remain incarcerated."

Jamil stated, "Yes, you're right, and there are hundreds of prisoners whom the occupying authorities claim have Israeli blood on their hands. They won't be released." Abdel Rahim responded, "We must do something to free these prisoners from the unjust occupation prisons." The others agreed, "Yes...yes, we must do something serious."

Three mujahideen in a car approached the Sarafand army base inside the territories occupied in 1948, pretending to be occupiers. A soldier waiting at a bus

stop at sunset, leaving his base headed home, signaled for a ride. As the mujahideen's car stopped near the soldier, one of them drew a pistol and fatally shot him three times.

The mujahideen dumped his body in a nearby olive grove and returned to Abdel Rahim, who was expecting them with a live soldier for negotiation purposes. When informed of the situation, they all went out and buried the body to prevent its discovery, potentially using it as leverage in future negotiations for prisoners. Days later, Abdel Rahim and some brothers ambushed a car near Beit Shemesh, killing three occupants and safely returning to their town.

Prime Minister Netanyahu continued his brash and bullish policies, confiscating land in Abu Ghneim, Jerusalem, to build a Jewish residential area separating Arab communities from the city, sparking significant media and political uproar. Abdel Rahim and his brothers pondered their next actions as many mujahideen were certain the time for serious action was near, dismissing any illusions of peace with the Jews as the signs began to manifest. They prepared for that day.

Across the West Bank, a military leader secretly arranged the formation of new cells and the distribution of weapons, including in Jerusalem, preparing for imminent actions.

In the Gaza Strip, Hassan began to manufacture grenades and locally made rifles in his workshop under the guidance of Ibrahim and an arms manufacturing expert. Despite the limited quality of the homemade rifles, they were considered better than stones and firebombs previously used in confrontations with the occupation. Amidst the developments concerning Mount Abu Ghneim in Jerusalem, the military leader in the West Bank's Al-Qassam Brigades contacted Abdel Rahim, as his cell was ready and active for a significant martyrdom operation in response to the Israeli government's actions at Abu Ghneim. They provided him with a bag of explosives intended for placement in a gathering place for the occupiers and then to be detonated remotely. Musa and another mujahid took the bag in their car to Tel Aviv, selecting a crowded cafe as the target.

On a Friday afternoon, the plan was for the other mujahid to leave the bag under a table among the crowd and pretend to fetch something from the cafe’s kitchen before leaving, triggering the explosion remotely. However, fate had other plans for Musa Abdul Qadir Abu Diya. He carried the bag down himself, entered the cafe area, and instead of leaving as planned, the bag exploded prematurely, resulting in his martyrdom and the deaths of three, injuring over fifty.

The Israeli government went into a frenzy, issuing threats and vows of retaliation. Once Musa's identity was confirmed, the Palestinian Authority's security forces quickly arrested Abdel Rahim and Jamil, subjecting them to interrogation in Hebron's prison before incarcerating them.

Aunt Fathiya was distraught over the imprisonment of her son Abdel Rahim. Whenever his father or uncle entered the house, she would scream at them to do something to secure his release, though their efforts to contact influential people were futile. She visited him in prison regularly, bringing one of her daughters along, heartbroken to see him in such a condition, even though he tried to keep spirits high and lighten her burden as if he wasn't the one imprisoned.

About eight months later, the prison guards informed Abdel Rahim and Jamil that they would be transferred to Jericho for their trial. They warned them of a significant mistake, as the occupation forces could potentially kidnap them from the Palestinian police. Despite this, the guards ignored the risks, and their pleas to see a responsible official to communicate these concerns were brushed aside by the head of Hebron's prison, who reassured them that nothing would happen.

Handcuffed, they were transported under the guard of another police vehicle. Hours into their journey, they found themselves ambushed by Israeli forces, who stopped their vehicle at gunpoint, called them by name to exit, and took them to an Israeli army vehicle which rushed them to an interrogation centre in Jerusalem.

Months later, my aunt was allowed to visit her son in the occupation's prisons. Trembling with fear and concern for her flesh and blood, she burst into tears upon seeing him. He tried to cheer her up and lighten her burden by making her laugh and talking about his experiences. Outraged, she screamed that his own people had handed him and his friend over to the Jews, cursing them from the depths of her heart. After the visit, my aunt was escorted out of the prison and returned home, telling her family what had happened and swearing that Abdel Rahim had been deliberately handed over to the enemy.

At home, it was natural for us to discuss what had happened to my cousin Abdel Rahim. My mother was furious about the incident. Mahmoud tried to justify the situation by saying it was unintentional, that the occupation forces had hijacked Abdel Rahim and his companion as part of a piracy operation, and it was impossible that there had been any deliberate handover.

Hassan saw this as an opportunity to attack Mahmoud's credibility. He questioned how such explanations could be true. Why had no one been held accountable if it was merely negligence? How did the Jews know exactly when the prisoners were being transported, their names, and even called them out by name? Why was Mahmoud so insistent that it was impossible? Weren't they detained for more than eight months? Hadn't hundreds of resistance youth been arrested and placed in prisons? Weren't people tortured during interrogations and in cells? Mahmoud remained silent until Hassan finished, then accused him of stirring emotions improperly, especially since the detained was my mother's nephew. Laughing, Hassan retorted that it was shameful for him to be accused of such manipulation, reminding everyone that he himself had been imprisoned by the authority for seven months, and Ibrahim had been forced to go into hiding for several months.

Tensions were escalating between the authority and its apparatus, and between the opposition groups. This tension reached one of its peaks following the assassination of Mujahid Mohyi al-Din al-Sharif in Ramallah, where Hamas accused the authority's agencies of colluding with Israeli intelligence to eliminate him, while the authority accused Hamas of killing him due to internal disagreements.

The peak of tension occurred after one of the young men was released from the occupation's prisons, carrying a plan to work towards freeing Palestinian prisoners still detained. The plan involved executing several martyrdom operations linked to the prisoner issue, preparing for further operations, and demanding the release of prisoners, threatening a major operation series if releases were not made.

Upon his release, he contacted several mujahideen, and they began preparing for a number of operations. The first was a dual operation at the Mahane Yehuda Market in Jerusalem, where two suicide bombers detonated themselves, causing death, destruction, and significant injuries. A statement was released demanding the release of prisoners, threatening further actions if the demands were not met. Another operation followed, resulting in more deaths, injuries, and destruction.

The Netanyahu government was furious, issuing threats and warnings, increasing pressure on the Palestinian Authority, especially from the Americans, which intensified tensions between the Authority and the opposition. The Authority initiated a new wave of arrests among the opposition, particularly targeting Hamas members, detaining them in its prisons. Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Abdel Rahman

were imprisoned in the newly built Beitunia prison, along with dozens of other detainees.

Debates within our home between Mahmoud on one side and Hassan and Ibrahim on the other became more intense, sometimes escalating to accusations and nearly leading to physical altercations, particularly between Mahmoud and Hassan, often ending the gatherings in disagreement and near estrangement.

Days later, Hassan was arrested again, and Ibrahim managed to evade capture at the last moment. The Likud government led by Benjamin Netanyahu fell due to the influence of extremists within it from ultra-religious parties, due to his refusal to agree to their positions on dealings with the Authority and the symbolic withdrawal from Hebron. Preparations began for new elections in Israel, which were won by the Labor Party candidate Ehud Barak.

Barak's victory was seen as a new hope by the Authority and peace supporters in our community, as he was expected to advance the peace process. With the beginning of the thaw in Palestinian-Israeli relations, tensions between the Authority and opposition forces increased. The Authority intensified its measures against opposition forces, fearing they might sabotage the opportunity for progress in the peace process.

The information reached the security services of the Palestinian Authority regarding the whereabouts of Ibrahim. A large force surrounded the location and threatened dire consequences if he did not surrender. He did, and was taken to prison. My mother's grief compounded—grieving for her nephew, her son, and her son-in-law, compounded by the sadness of Hassan's wife, and Maryam and her children. The house once again became a tomb of silence, tears, and sorrow.

News came of the good intentions of the new Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, to proceed to final status negotiations with the Palestinians, which the Authority welcomed and the Americans encouraged. Discussions began about the great prospects of achieving Palestinian dreams of statehood with Jerusalem as its capital and the end of the occupation, with Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders. Indeed, the negotiations began at Camp David between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, under the sponsorship of U.S. President Bill Clinton.

We followed the news of the negotiations earnestly and gathered at my mother's to watch the updates on TV. Despite the absence of Hassan and Ibrahim, imprisoned at the time, their opposing voices and views against negotiating and making peace with Israel were missing.

My mother's distress over the imprisonment of Hassan and Ibrahim was apparent. Mahmoud repeatedly tried to comfort her, suggesting that a successful conclusion to the Camp David talks and the implementation of any agreement reached would lead to their release, and even that Israel would release prisoners detained in its jails as the Palestinian negotiators had raised this issue and Israel would have no excuse to hold the prisoners once a permanent and final agreement was signed.

Days later, the negotiations exploded as no agreement was reached. Israel was not prepared to negotiate or offer reasonable solutions on major sticking points such as the status of Jerusalem, refugees, the borders of June 5, 1967, and the settlements.

News leaked about immense pressure exerted on Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, even from U.S. President Bill Clinton, to make concessions on these issues in the face of Israeli intransigence. Arafat's response was an unequivocal refusal. The negotiators were sent back home, and the region reached a deadlock, clearly awaiting a spark to ignite it.

That spark came through a visit by the new Likud party leader, Ariel Sharon, who had become the leader of the opposition in Israel. He entered the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound guarded by hundreds of soldiers and police, setting off the spark that inflamed the region. Enraged masses protested against his visit and the desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Crowds emerged in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem, confronting Israeli military checkpoints in violent clashes using stones and empty bottles, reminiscent of the first Intifada. It was clear that the Israeli military's reaction was violent and irrational, especially under what many described as a government of peace and negotiation. However, Barak the politician was no different from Barak the military man; he intensified his political battle, believing that the Palestinian side had driven the masses to the streets to pressure him into concessions from his stance at Camp David. Orders were issued for the Israeli military to brutally suppress the uprising protesters, with no mercy or compassion. Young people and demonstrators gathered at checkpoints and points of contact. The casualties mounted, and as the sacrifices increased, so did the number of martyrs and the injured.

Some Palestinian police officers or security personnel could not control their nerves as they watched their kin and brethren being mowed down by Israeli gunfire, or snipers playing with their skulls. This sparked the zeal of some, and they began to retaliate, leading to casualties in the Israeli military. It became clear

that the situation was spiraling to a point of no return; this was not merely a power struggle between the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships. It was not an attempt by the Palestinian side to improve its negotiating position as some negotiators had stated. The situation had grown too large to control and had slipped from the hands of those who had intended it merely as a negotiating tool.

The number of Palestinian martyrs exceeded several hundreds, and the Israeli soldiers, following their commanders' directives, showed no regard for the lives of the Palestinian people, engaging in killing and spreading terror.

In a room of Gaza Central Prison, fifteen prisoners gather around the television, watching the evening news broadcast about the events, confrontations, and the fall of dozens of martyrs and hundreds of wounded. That day, the broadcast showcased the clash points, including those at Salah al-Din gate in Rafah, at the Tuffah checkpoint west of Khan Younis, near Kfar Darom settlement close to Deir al-Balah, and the particularly intense scenes at Martyrs Junction near Netzarim settlement, with martyrs and wounded at the Erez crossing and east of Shuja'iyya, along with similar confrontations at contact points in the West Bank, such as around Jerusalem, at the outskirts of Ramallah, at Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, around Jenin and its camp.

A profound silence enveloped the room during the news, and as soon as it ended, expressions of anger erupted from those young men in that room and others across the prison. One shouted, proclaiming "God is great! What is happening, people?" Another banged his foot against the bed, exclaiming, "How long will this continue?" A third buried his head between his hands, squeezing them without uttering a word, and a fourth beat his head with the palm of his hand, among other expressions of rage or despair.

Ibrahim sat on the edge of his bed, legs dangling to the floor, his arms resting on his knees, and his head supported by his hands, remaining silent. One of the young men approached him, asking, "What do you think, Ibrahim?" Ibrahim looked at him and said, "This is our reality, the lives and blood of our people have become a testing ground for Oslo. If it succeeds, good; if not, why not start from scratch? This is the solution. All sacrifices of the first Intifada have been wasted, and now, with the politicians and negotiators, we've reached a deadlock. What's stopping us from starting anew?"

"Hundreds, if not thousands, of martyrs will fall, and tens of thousands will be wounded. You'll find someone to propose going to a new Oslo, or whatever you

want to call it. After every round of our people's struggle and sacrifice, the politicians come to reap the fruits; because they rush to harvest the fruit before its time, they are punished by being deprived of it. Neither does the fruit stay on the tree to ripen, nor is it useful when harvested because it's not yet ripe. This was the solution with our people's first Intifada, and now we must start again until someone imagines that the fruit has ripened and its time has come, only to destroy everything our people have sacrificed for."

The young man asked, "So, you believe this situation will continue for a long time?" Ibrahim smiled and replied, "Yes, it will continue and it will prolong. Can't you see that the region is entering a state of complexity and self-entrapment? Everything is packed with explosives, everything is interconnected, and one explosion leads to another series of blasts. The occupation has no one willing or capable of compromising on our people's and nation's demands, not regarding Jerusalem, the 1967 borders, the refugees, the settlements, nor the water. You won't find anyone in the Palestinian people who can advance a step forward as long as these issues remain unresolved. And anyone who dares to do so will find a million screaming in his face, accusing him of betrayal.

Therefore, the situation is complicated and the wounds of the youth will continue to bleed. These young men will keep throwing themselves to death in front of the rifles and tanks of the occupation without any compensation. This is forbidden and should not be allowed. Someone must have the courage and bravery to stand up and shout to them, 'Enough, this is going in vain.' Ibrahim laughed and said, 'No, my brother, this is not in vain. These young men are winning martyrdom with Allah; their intentions are pure and sincere. This strike must take its share from our blood, and the situation will undoubtedly evolve. Tomorrow, you will see the crowds have grown angrier, the situation will escalate despite them. Someone will carry the flag and brandish the sword in the face of the executioner, and the enemy will pay the price for this blood they have spilled from their comfort, security, stability, economy, and even from the water of their eyes." The young man asked, "How long will they keep us in prisons now that the peace illusion with the detestable occupation has fallen?" Ibrahim laughed and said, "It won't be long, just a few weeks."

The intifada events continued to escalate in intensity. The occupation forces gathered their capabilities using all their methods, and it was clear that sniper units from the occupation forces were positioned in watchtowers at checkpoints, barriers, or settlements, amusing themselves by targeting the protesters' heads.

Television reports showed this, where a soldier using a large binoculars would spot a protester, describe him to the sniper lying next to him behind a sniper rifle, the protester wearing a yellow shirt, with long hair, stone in hand, throwing it, "Do you see him?" The sniper replies, "Yes, I have him in sight," the first soldier says, "Take him down," then that soldier fires a shot, the youth around him scramble to carry him under a hail of bullets, and that soldier describes another target to his companion, confirming that he is a skilled sniper with high proficiency and experience.

In response to increased aggression, more members of the Palestinian security forces and police began returning fire directed at them and those around them, initiating clear sniper operations targeting armed individuals, including police officers. This led to bombardment of police assembly points and some of their locations.

The Israeli government, its agencies, and its media began accusing the Palestinian Authority of allowing prisoners in its jails to plan operations against Israel, clearly preparing to act against the prisoners held by the Authority. The first of these attempts targeted Sanin Prison in Nablus, where one of the sections was bombed by F16s with half-ton explosives, completely destroying it.

Mahmoud Abu Hanoud, the intended target, was at the edge of the section and miraculously survived, but many police officers guarding the prison were killed or injured. Caught between continuing to detain these prisoners, in compliance with agreements with Israel, and releasing them—which would appear to the Americans as yielding to pressure—the Authority found itself in a dilemma.

In Betunia Prison, dozens of prisoners were held in one of the wings. Among the detainees in a room were Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Abdel Rahman. Suddenly, one of the young men screamed about Apache helicopters overhead, pointing out the window. Another shouted that it seemed they were about to be bombed, creating a chaotic and noisy atmosphere. Sheikh Jamal called for calm and restraint among the young men and summoned the guard, who arrived lethargically, as guards often do, to an unspecified location for fear of bombing their rooms. The guard claimed he had no authority to move them. Sheikh Jamal demanded the officer on duty be called; the guard hesitated and yawned. Sheikh Jamal shouted through the bars, waking him from his stupor, insisting the officer be summoned as their location might be bombed. The guard hurried to the telephone at the end of the corridor and called his officer, who came asking what had happened. Sheikh Jamal explained the situation, and although the officer

tried to reassure them that nothing would happen since they were nearby, Sheikh Jamal clarified that Apache helicopters were targeting the rooms, each with a designated missile. The officer continued to reassure them, but Sheikh Jamal insisted they would not stay in those rooms under any circumstances.

The officer asked, "What can I do?" Sheikh Jamal replied, "Get us out of here to your offices and rooms." The officer responded, "I can't, I don't have the orders." The Sheikh shouted, "Call your commander, you are responsible for what might happen to us." He went to make the call while the young men watched the helicopters circling continuously around the building. Jamal shouted at the officer, demanding to know what happened and the response; he was told that their request was denied. Outraged, the Sheikh yelled, "Denied?" and signaled to the young men, saying, "Break down the doors." Several youths advanced with an iron bed and rammed it against the door repeatedly until it broke off its hinges, as did the doors in other rooms. Everyone spilled into the corridor just as fully equipped forces wielding batons and shields approached from a distance, led by the site commander. The prisoners started shouting and chanting as one young man exclaimed, "Aren't you ashamed? We are caught between the missiles of the occupation and your rifles and batons!"

The site commander ordered his soldiers to stop and retreat, and began to negotiate with Sheikh Jamal who explained the situation. They were allowed to remain in the corridor and the yards, and if necessary, move to the police rooms and offices.

Events unfolded rapidly as the brutality of the occupation forces' war machine began to spur thoughts of an intifada that would cause losses to the occupation and its citizens. Several attempts at martyrdom operations were made within the borders of the Zionist entity, the occupied territories since 1948. Although some of these attempts were only partially successful, causing injuries, they started to spread fear among the settlers and heralded more to come. On many occasions, young men managed to infiltrate the occupied territories with their automatic rifles, opening fire in markets, streets, or stations, killing some and injuring many. Enemy police and security forces would then kill or capture them. Every day, massive crowds would come out to mourn the martyrs, roaring with anger, calling for revenge and for the enemy to pay for its crimes.

Using helicopters and planes, the occupation forces intensified their targeting of security and police sites belonging to the Authority. They would initially circle around these sites, which would be evacuated, and then bomb and destroy them

as if to send a message to the Authority that destruction was imminent if things continued as they were.

Feeling the imminent danger of an occupation airstrike on a prison housing political detainees from the opposition, the Authority began releasing some of them. My brother Hassan was set free, and others were transferred to unknown civilian public buildings where they were detained, similar to what happened with Ibrahim.

The Barak government fell, and new elections were held in Israel. Ariel Sharon, known as "the Butcher," rose to the prime ministership, and it was clear that the situation was heading towards further escalation and complexity.

Chapter Thirty

In the first month of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, triggered by Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque on September 28, 2000, Israeli forces fired nearly one million bullets at Palestinian demonstrators in Gaza and the West Bank, according to statistics published by Israeli journalists.

Whether under Ehud Barak or Ariel Sharon, who succeeded him, Israeli government leaders gave the green light to their military commanders to suppress the intifada and extinguish its roots. These commanders, in turn, ordered their soldiers to mow down the demonstrators. Our people did not hesitate, delay, or retreat; the youth surged forward to confront the occupation forces, carrying their lives in their hands without a second thought.

Faced with waves of repression, killing, and state terrorism by the criminal occupation and its army, the zeal of many free Palestinians of various ideological beliefs, political thoughts, and organizational affiliations was ignited. They took up arms and decided to defend the lives of their people against the criminality of a gangster state that has long prattled about democracy and human rights—from Fatah to Hamas, Jihad, and the Fronts. They all shared one grievance and the injustice of the criminal occupier, raising their rifles to start giving the killer a taste of the bitter cup that our people have endured in Gaza, Ramallah, Nablus, and all the cities and villages of the homeland. Cells of young fighters began to form, targeting occupation soldiers and settlers, inflicting casualties on the occupier.

The forces rejecting the Oslo Accords still suffered from the blows dealt by the Authority before the intifada erupted, so they were initially unable to act strongly. They started weakly, but their efforts were susceptible to growth.

Meanwhile, Fatah, with its members spread throughout the Authority's apparatus, had the youth, weapons, and capability, but lacked the decision. Taking determination upon themselves, they embarked anew on the path of armed struggle against the criminal occupying forces.

Muhannad Abu Halawa killed two guards at the National Bank branch in East Jerusalem on October 30 and claimed responsibility on behalf of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. This marked the name adopted by various Fatah groups that had commenced armed operations, largely under the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades

banner. Hussein Abayat's abilities and boldness established him as the brigades' leader in the Bethlehem and Beit Jala area. He and dozens of fighters and resistors began disturbing the sleep of the occupying forces and their settlers in the area, including in the Gilo settlement on the outskirts of Jerusalem, where he was assassinated on November 9, 2000. In Gaza, the initial groups of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades formed and started carrying out operations against Israeli forces and settlers. Crowds that gathered in the streets, particularly at funerals, vociferously criticized the symbols of the previous phase that had ended in cooperation with Israel and the Americans, and repeatedly attacked centres holding political prisoners, demanding their release and sometimes breaking down walls to free them.

Ibrahim and hundreds of other mujahideen were released in Gaza and the West Bank, and they immediately prepared to take on their role in defending the people against the war waged by the Israeli army.

One of these mujahideen, when informed by his guards of his impending release, showed no excitement and did not hurry to prepare to leave but remained seated, motionless. Surprised, they asked him why, and he said he did not want to leave and that they could keep him longer if they liked. They carried him, placed him in restraints, and took him to his residence, where they removed his restraints and pushed him out of the vehicle.

We celebrated Ibrahim's return from prison. Esraa and Yasser clung to his neck, kissing and playing with him, both delighted by his return. Many friends and neighbours in the house came to welcome him and congratulate him on his safety. He seized the opportunity to speak publicly about the peace 'myth' marketed to our people, which had squandered our efforts, struggle, and sacrifices over the years of the first intifada. He reiterated that the concept of peace with the occupiers is a myth repeatedly marketed to our people, and it will continue to be promoted from time to time to deceive our people, denying them their freedom and dignity. He reflected on the path of resistance in Lebanon, where it forced the occupiers to flee Southern Lebanon under the impact of its strikes.

The occupation was ready to flee from Gaza and from the West Bank in 1993. The resistance blinded it with its precise strikes, and many of its leaders screamed then that they would do it. But we, the Palestinians, laid down a ladder for our enemy to climb down from the tree of his crimes. Not only did we save him from his predicament, but we also entangled ourselves in agreements where we

recognized his right over three-quarters of our land. We got involved in coordination and security cooperation agreements. The resistance was struck, the honorable were arrested, and they were thrown into prisons where oppression and torture were practiced against them. Simply put, we transformed into protectors of the occupier's security. And what did we receive in return for all that? His refusal to recognize our rights.

When we held firm to them, he unleashed the hell of his war machine on us and our people. Now, he harvests dozens of martyrs daily, wounds and injures hundreds, and here are his American helicopters pouring missiles on the honorable among our people from all factions, whose noble souls refused to be content, to submit, and to bow to the occupier's tyranny.

This land, brothers, is a sacred, pure, and blessed land. God said about it, "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (Surah Al-Isra, verse 1). This land is the land of Isra and Mi'raj, a blessed land, a land of Ribat (frontier) and Jihad until the Day of Judgment, and no one will be able to stop this until our hopes are fulfilled with God's help.

The Arab and Muslim public reacted to the situation in Palestine, and they took to the streets in the capitals of their countries from Rabat to Sanaa to Jakarta. Millions went to the streets chanting in support of the Intifada in Palestine, against the crimes and massacres of the occupation, their voices roaring, "Khaybar Khaybar, O Jews... Muhammad's army will return," and they screamed, "Revenge, revenge... O Al-Qassam Brigades."

A young man in the prime of his life steps out of a car on the beach of Tel Aviv. He walks with steady steps and a confident smile towards the amusement area on the beach. It's early June, and he finds a large crowd of young men and women packed in front of one of the amusements. He slips among them with confidence and calm and presses the button in his hand. An explosion deafens ears, screams and wails rise, and ambulances, security personnel, police, and bomb experts rush to the scene. Dozens are killed and others injured.

We were sitting in my mother's room, about to move to our room, when the regular programs on the TV were interrupted, and it began to broadcast live from the scene. Statements of condemnation and denunciation of this terrorist operation began to come from all sides. I looked at Ibrahim as if to ask him what

he thought about this, and understanding my implication, he said: "Don't you see this unjust world? Our people have been slaughtered continuously for eight months, and the occupation army pours hellfire upon us, using its advanced arsenal against us—its planes, tanks, and all its weapons—while the world remains deaf and mute. And yet, when any action comes from our side, the oppressed, overwhelmed side, which is merely asking for the minimum standard of a free and dignified life, voices rise even from our nation, and even from some of our own people, condemning and denouncing. But all this holds no value, as these millions from Rabat to Jakarta were just days ago threatening in the streets, demanding this. Did the world not hear them when they chanted for revenge, revenge, O Al-Qassam Brigades? What revenge other than this did the masses of our nation want? And if the masses of our nation want this, and it is our right to defend ourselves, what harm is there in that?"

In July, the occupation forces, with their helicopters, planes, tanks, guided missiles, special forces, and nefarious methods using their agents, attempted ninety-five assassination operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, succeeding in about eighty of them. They reaped the lives of dozens of activists and cadres from the well-known Palestinian factions. Missile shells penetrated the windows and offices of the Islamic Studies Centre in Nablus, which is located in a building all of which are residential apartments, killing Jamal Salim, Jamal Mansour, and four others working in the centre. The crowds in Nablus and in all cities, villages, and camps of the homeland chanted, demanding a deterrent response to the occupation for its crimes. Hundreds of thousands screamed at the top of their voices for revenge, revenge, O Al-Qassam Brigades. Thunderous voices demanded an end to the crimes of the occupation, which began practicing a clear policy secretly named by its leaders as the policy of hunting activists, allowing the occupying forces to target any Palestinian activist from any of the factions, whose name appears on a long list of targets, and whose name appears in any of the investigations conducted by the intelligence of the occupation or is mentioned in any report raised by one of the agents.

A young Palestinian journalist heads to Jerusalem looking for a suitable target for a major martyrdom operation. She finds one of the crowded restaurants, and the next day she carries an explosive device hidden in one of the musical instruments, followed by a young man with empty hands so as not to arouse the suspicion of the security forces scattered everywhere in anticipation of martyrdom operations.

As she approached the restaurant, she slowed down while he quickened his pace, took the package from her, and entered the Sparo restaurant. Minutes after he entered, he detonated the explosive device, causing a loud explosion that scattered the bodies of the dead from the restaurant doors. Screams and cries rose as ambulances and security personnel, along with bomb experts, rushed to the scene. Over fifteen were killed and dozens were injured.

Ibrahim and Hassan, along with a third young man named Adnan, were working quietly in Hassan's lathe and fitting workshop in the Asqoula area of Gaza, following the young man's instructions to prepare the frame of a mortar shell and its launching cannon after they had packed it with explosives and propellant materials. They placed it in the car's trunk and headed south until they reached the outskirts of the residential area. They set up the cannon, loaded the shell, and recited "In the name of God, God is the greatest, and you did not throw when you threw but it was God who threw." They moved away and threw themselves to the ground as the cannon shook with the sound of the explosion, and the shell soared into the sky before falling near the Nitzarim settlement. The three mujahideen embraced, congratulating each other on the success, and then flew back to the workshop where they continued preparing dozens of shells and simple homemade cannons after having prepared the first cannon and five shells. Ibrahim carried them in his car and sped to the north. There, in the Jabalia camp, he knocked on the door of one of the houses, and a young man came out and got into the car with him. They went to the edges of the residential areas to the north, set up the cannon, and launched the first shell at the Nitzanit settlement. Then they returned in the car where Ibrahim dropped off the young man along with the cannon and the remaining four shells and hurried back to the workshop where he loaded the newly completed cannon and five shells into the car and sped to the south. He knocked on a door in the Khan Yunis camp, came out with one of the young men to the outskirts of the camp, set up the cannon, and fired the first shell, then returned where he dropped off the young man, took the cannon and the remaining shells.

The threats and warnings from the occupation leadership about the launching of mortar shells at their settlements caused some who dominated political life in the West Bank and Gaza to tremble, and voices of some moderates were raised, calling to stop these futile games that might bring harm.

Ibrahim and Hassan continued preparing more of them, listening to the news and those calls while they smiled. Ibrahim said in wonder at these people, "What do

they want? They want us to be killed by the occupation forces and do nothing but wail and raise white flags and beg for mercy from the butcher who knows no mercy."

Work, beloved ones, work, for this is a jihad... victory or martyrdom. We must make weapons, however simple, and strive to improve them every day to increase their destructive power and range, and strike the enemy who possesses all those military capabilities. Despite the simplicity of our weapons and our limited means, with God's help, we will create a new equation in the conflict, establishing a balance of terror and deterrence. They bombard us, so we bombard them. May God be pleased with Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, who said: "By God, if I found nothing but dust, I would fight them with it." And we, thank God, have much more than dust. We must fight them with everything we possess and always strive to enhance our capabilities. We are just beginning this battle, which the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, spoke of in the authentic hadith reported in Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim: "The Hour will not come until you fight the Jews, and the stone will say, 'O Muslim, O servant of Allah, this is a Jew behind me; come and kill him.' This day is coming, and it is near, God willing.

Abu Ali Mustafa, the General Secretary of the Popular Front, steps out of his car and ascends the stairs to his office in a building in Ramallah. Minutes after he sits in his office chair, an Apache helicopter targets the building and bombs his office, provoking modest protests on how the occupation forces could target a political figure and a Palestinian leader while the civilized world turns a blind eye and deaf ear.

Weeks later, two young men spend a week at the Hyatt Hotel in Jerusalem, where the extremist Jewish minister Rehavam Ze'evi, who called for the expulsion of Palestinians and was a general in the occupation army and served as head of government combatting what they called Palestinian terrorism, sometimes stays. Shortly after seven in the morning, as he leaves his room, one of the young men calls out to him. Ze'evi turns, their eyes meet for a moment, and shots ring out from the young man's pistol, killing the criminal. The young men then rush to a car in the hotel garage and make their escape, turning the hotel and its surroundings upside down. The occupation government threatens and warns, and voices rise on the Palestinian side calling for a cessation of the resistance, of suicide operations, and of firing mortar shells. Ibrahim listens to these voices and calls, smiling, and says: "This won't last... This won't last. The occupation will not

allow us to stop; it will continue its assault, and we have no choice but to kneel and surrender all our rights, then perhaps the aggression will stop."

Our governor and torturer is the same occupier, and since we cannot accept bowing down or relinquishing all our rights, and because our enemy will not accept us unless we do, this situation will not last long. Our enemy will resume pressuring us to concede, and of course, we will not. Instead, they will continue killing and aggression, thinking we will yield. Therefore, we must continue preparing and getting ready. Let's go, Hasan, let's go.

Ibrahim, Hasan, and the third young man, Adnan, drive to Khan Yunis where they meet a mujahid and proceed to a machining and milling workshop on Jalal Street. There, they focus on preparing ammunition and cannons, explaining the process to the workshop owner and another mujahid, then moving to another and then another workshop to train their owners.

A young man from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades steps out of a car in central Tel Aviv with a bag, heading towards a wedding hall filled with occupiers. He opens the bag, pulls out an AK-47 rifle, several magazines, and a few hand grenades. He moves closer and begins shooting and throwing grenades, then continues firing until a large force from the occupation army engages him, and his soul ascends to the highest heavens after killing and injuring dozens of them.

Advanced aircraft of the occupation army bomb mujahideen, activists, and Palestinian youths across the nation, and the occupation's war machine harvests lives indiscriminately. Soldiers rampage behind heavy tanks, helicopters, modern weapons, and massive bulldozers devour everything in their path from houses, workshops, and farms. Palestinian mujahideen and fidayeen prepare explosives from basic materials like fertilizers and some chemicals, making belts which they strap around their waists, and launch into the heart of the brutal enemy to give them a taste of the suffering they inflict on our people day and night. Operations intensified in major cities like Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Netanya, and Ashdod, spreading terror and panic among the occupiers. The streets are empty except for an old man or a young one hurrying to finish their errands quickly. Cafes are entirely empty, restaurants are deserted, public transport and buses are empty, rarely does one or two persons board along with the driver.

In central Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem, sandbags are stacked in front of doors and shops to a height of over one and a half meters, resembling military sites and barracks. Thousands of soldiers are everywhere, outnumbering civilians by many

times. Every day or several days, barriers and barricades are set up where they begin to inspect cars and their occupants, as news of impending operations has reached them. Cars line up in endless queues, life is disrupted at shop doors, and hundreds of shops display signs announcing they are for sale or closed until further notice, as the economic life has collapsed.

Also, Apache helicopters assassinate another person, then another, and tens of thousands of people rush towards the targeted site to try to save the injured if any life remains, screaming and demanding retaliation and punishment of the brutal occupation.

Ibrahim, Hasan, and Adnan sit with plans for longer-range rockets in front of them for mortar shells. Ibrahim asks Adnan if it's technically possible in his workshop to execute these plans. Adnan scrutinizes the plans a second and third time, then nods in agreement. They jump to work, load what they've prepared into the car, and head to Beit Hanoun where they set up the rockets, light the fuse underneath, step back slightly and pray for success. Seconds later, the rocket roars off, crossing the border. The three mujahideen embrace and hurry back to prepare and manufacture more and to teach others in other areas.

Qassam rockets and others begin to launch by the dozens in response to this or that crime. Some voices tremble from the reaction of the occupation which begins to threaten and vow. Ibrahim smiles, saying: "What more can they do than what they have done now—assassinations, invasions, bombings, killings, and destruction? Now they must rebuild, to find something to destroy again." Adnan says, "Don't you see they're betting that people are tired and that the people want to rest, having been exhausted by the high price paid?" Ibrahim smiles and responds: "Who is tired? Who is exhausted? Our mothers and women who pay the price with the lives of their sons and their homes and everything dear to them, not one of them has spoken a word indicating fatigue. Haven't you seen every time a martyr's mother declares she is ready to sacrifice her other sons for Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa?"

Amidst the others who claim our people are exhausted, they are but a handful with political or economic interests, a small group. Yet, the enduring people are ready to sacrifice everything dear for their honor, dignity, and sanctities.

A boy not yet seventeen, dressed in a camouflaged military uniform and wearing a green cap inscribed with "There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah," from the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, holds his rifle and

several hand grenades. He enters "Abu Nidal's" house in Shuja'iyya, pushing the door into the courtyard, where Umm Nidal jumps up, saying: "My beloved son Muhammad, what is this?" The boy smiles and says, "Mother, I am going on a martyrdom operation." The mother pauses, then Muhammad asks, "Mother, do you remember this olive tree? The one under which Imad was martyred years ago? Do you remember it, mother? Do you remember Imad? And how we loved its fruit because it mingled with Imad's spirit? Remember how you raised us to love Palestine, Jerusalem, jihad, and sacrifice? The time has come, mother. I have seen myself storming their position, slaughtering them like sheep, then becoming a martyr, and I saw myself before the Prophet Muhammad in paradise, as he cheers for me, 'Bravo, Muhammad, bravo.'"

Tears well up in the mother's eyes. She pulls the edge of her scarf to wipe away the tears before they can fall down her cheeks, saying, "May Allah grant you success, my son, and make your aim true," then she embraces him, kissing his hands, his head, his rifle, advising him, "When you storm in, do not hesitate or look back, my son, and let no mercy for them in the religion of Allah take hold of you, my beloved." And until we meet in the eternal garden by the beloved Prophet, goodbye, my heart's joy, my soul's solace, goodbye. Muhammad kisses her head, then bends to kiss her hand, and sets off, saying, "Keep the mobile phone next to you; I will say my final goodbye from there," and leaves. Umm Nidal sits on her prayer rug, deep in her heart praying for her son's success and acceptance.

Muhammad crosses the barbed wires around the Etsion settlement, crawling towards the military religious institute inside. He activates his communicator, pressing a button. Umm Nidal, by the device at her side, hears, "I am here, mother, I have reached my target, dear, goodbye, mother, and see you in paradise," he says. He leaves the device open on his belt to broadcast the sound of the battle, advancing into the building, shouting "Allahu Akbar, Khaybar is out," throwing his grenades one after another, then storms the main hall firing his gun. Umm Nidal murmurs as she hears, "O Allah, make his shot true, for You are the shooter and Your shooting never misses." Gunfire is exchanged with the forces rushing to the site, and Muhammad falls chanting the Shahada, "I testify there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger." Umm Muhammad ululates in praise, "Praise be to Allah who honored me with his martyrdom, and I pray to Allah to reunite me with him in His mercy's abode."

As people gathered, one of the neighbours asked Umm Nidal, knowing that her son was going to his death, "You bid him farewell, yet you know he is going to die?" Umm Nidal replied, "By Allah, he is dearer to me than the world and all it contains, but he is worth sacrificing for the sake of Allah, for Jerusalem, and for Al-Aqsa. By Allah, I am ready to sacrifice Nidal, Hossam, and Rawad for the sake of Allah, for the honor of our people, and the dignity of our nation. I yearn for Allah's mercy to reunite us all in a place of truth by His side in the presence of the beloved Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him."

My mobile phone rang. Lifting it to my ear, I heard Ibrahim's voice from the other end: "Hello, Ahmed. Peace be upon you." I responded eagerly, "Ibrahim, peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be upon you. Where have you been? It's been a while since I've seen you. I've missed you." Ibrahim replied, "That's why I called. How are you? How is everyone there? Send my regards to everyone. Don't forget to kiss Israa and Yasser for me." I asked, "Won't you come to see them? They haven't seen you in a while." He responded, "I don't know; I'll try, but you know how busy I am." I asked, "What's new with you, Ibrahim?" He laughed and said, "You know, Ahmed, I had a vision last night, clear as the dawn. I saw myself reading the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, including one from Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Prophet said: 'The Day of Judgment will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims kill them. When a Jew hides behind rocks and trees, the rocks and trees will say, 'O Muslim, O servant of Allah, this is a Jew behind me; come and kill him,' except the Gharqad tree because it is one of the trees of the Jews.' And another hadith from Abdullah ibn Hawala, who said that the Prophet told him: 'You will be stationed in armies: one in the Levant (including Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon), one in Iraq, and one in Yemen.' Abdullah then stood and said, 'Command me, O Messenger of Allah.' The Prophet said, 'Go to the Levant, and those who refuse should go to Yemen and drink from its waters, for Allah has assured me of the Levant and its people.' And another: 'A group from my Ummah will always prevail in their adherence to the commandments of Allah. They will be victorious over their enemies and will not be harmed by those who oppose them, except for what afflicts them of hardship, until Allah's command comes while they are in that state.' They asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, where are they?' He replied, 'In and around Jerusalem.'"

Abdullah bin Hawala said to the Prophet Muhammad, "O Messenger of Allah, assign me a land where I should live, for if I knew you would remain, I would choose nothing over your proximity." The Prophet said, "Go to the Levant,"

repeating it three times. Seeing his reluctance towards the Levant, the Prophet said, "Do you know what Allah says about it? 'O Levant, O Levant, My hand is over you, O Levant. You are my chosen land from my territories, into which I send my best servants. You are my blessing, and my tool for punishment. You are unique, and to you is the gathering.'"

"One night, during my ascension, I saw a white pillar resembling pearls being carried by angels. I asked, 'What are you carrying?' They replied, 'We are instructed to place the pillar of Islam in the Levant.' While sleeping, I saw a book snatched from under my pillow. I thought Allah had abandoned the inhabitants of Earth, but then I saw it turned into a radiant light leading me to the Levant. Therefore, whoever refuses to go to the Levant should join Yemen and drink from its well, for Allah has guaranteed protection for the Levant and its people."

"Then, Ahmad, I saw myself fasting, and the Prophet Muhammad told me, 'Your iftar is with us today, Ibrahim,' as if awaiting me. I exclaimed, does this mean...but he interrupted, 'Do not shout, Ahmad. I am taking all precautions, but such an invitation cannot be declined.' With that, he hung up."

"I was momentarily stunned, tears welling up in my eyes, realizing these were his parting words. Then, I rushed upstairs to the second floor, and there was Mariam smiling at me. I asked if he had spoken to her, and she said yes, but in a dream. She recounted his farewell that she would never forget, entrusting her with Esraa and Yaser."

"She smiled as tears ran down my cheeks, mocking, 'Why do you weep, you fool? What's gotten into you?' Then the sound of an explosion rang out when an Apache helicopter struck the car Ibrahim was in. My heart seemed to stop as I ran outside."

"Thousands rushed towards the bombed car, some recognizing it as Ibrahim the Righteous. I gathered Ibrahim's remains on a stretcher and the crowd surged like a wild sea around the martyr's body towards the house. At the doorstep, Mariam stood, her headscarf adjusted to cover her hair, smiling as her ululation rose above the clamor, flanked by Yaser and Esraa, with my mother peeking out behind her, dabbing her tear with a handkerchief edge."

I reached the door just as Mahmoud was coming out of the house. I lifted Yaser onto my shoulder, and Mahmoud carried Esraa on his. I reached out to Mariam, and Mahmoud did the same, but instead, she handed each of us a Kalashnikov rifle. We took the rifles, raised them above our heads, and set off with the crowds

behind us chanting, "Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews... the army of Muhammad will return. In the name of Allah, Allah is the greatest... In the name of Allah, the time of Khaybar has come. With our souls, with our blood, we sacrifice for you, O martyr. With our souls, with our blood, we sacrifice for you, Palestine... To Jerusalem we are heading, martyrs by the millions." From the side streets, thousands of masked men from the Al-Qassam Brigades in their recognizable attire lined up endlessly, raising green flags. Similarly, members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in their distinct uniforms lined up endlessly and raised yellow flags, while the Jerusalem Brigades raised black flags, among others carrying their weapons, waving them in the air in various types.

As I waved my rifle and held Yaser with my other hand on my shoulder, images and the last words Ibrahim spoke to me haunted my mind.

This narrative concluded in December 2004 at the Eshel Prison, Be'er Sheva, Palestine. It was completed in the cells of Be'er Sheva prison with its thirtieth chapter, but the tragedy of its writer and his comrades continues in the dungeons of the occupation's prisons.